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CHAPTER XIII

TREFALKA AND STEVE

I MUST tell the story of Trefalka Gralak, who is dead now. When I first knew her, two years ago, she was a dear, soft-hearted little thing with a pretty face and figure. She loved a man named Steve Bleczak.

They had been sweethearts, these two, ever since the old days in the school, and they were graduated together from the school house into the factory.

When big, muscular Steve used to show up in the work room Trefalka's blue eyes shone and her cheeks flushed. Then she used to shake the heavy dark curls down round her face to hide her confusion. Oh, yes, Trefalka was very much in love with Steve.

ANNEX

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Virginia Brooks

MY BATTLES WITH VICE

BY

VIRGINIA BROOKS
Author of "Little Lost Sister."

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INTRODUCTION

"MY BATTLES WITH VICE" is the story of the struggle for honor and virtue of the girl who must work to live.

It is the story of thousands who have fought the battle of modern industrial life and lost.

Virginia Brooks is the girl, who single-handed fought the forces of evil in West Hammond, Illinois, and compelled the town to clean up. It was she who drove the worst dives in Christendom out of existence, because, knowing the law, she fought for its enforcement.

This story is written by a young woman reared in the best social atmosphere, whose desire to aid her less fortunate sisters manifested itself early in life.

With the energy and eagerness of youth,

backed by the foremost philanthropic interests in Chicago, she sought out and studied at first hand the problems of the six-dollar-a-week working girl—not by asking questions, but by living with the girl, working with her side by side for the same wage, experiencing her temptations, sharing her sufferings, confronting her problems.

Virginia Brooks did not stop there. She followed the girl who had fallen to those precarious crags and ledges down the mountainside that delay the final plunge into the abyss. In the amusement resorts, dance halls and byways that exit all in one direction, she learned the lesson of the ages from a new viewpoint—the viewpoint of the new woman.

THE PUBLISHERS.

FOREWORD

THE OLD UNDERLYING EVIL

THE social evil is as old as humanity. As far back as history gives any record, evidences of its existence and the subsequent terrible traffic are to be found. From savagery to modern civilization women have been slaves to the brute that lives in man. They have been captured, sold for profit, and have had little to say.

The Dark Ages are replete with data on this sad, shameful phase of life. The dawn of the Christian era, with its accompanying teaching of purity and chastity, introduced extreme asceticism. A radical stand was necessary where civilization had apparently gone sex mad.

After Christianity was established and extreme persecution of the Christians had ceased, a general laxity developed and gradually the old conditions returned. During the Middle Ages social laxity increased with astounding rapidity.

Laws framed for the suppression of evil were not even enforced. One has but to read of the court of Louis XIV to gather an idea of the condition of society during this period. Such royal courts set the example and looseness ran through all grades of society.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century scientific methods were devised for handling the victims of this evil period. More or less interest was aroused in the bringing about of an improved condition of affairs. Some effort was made to punish defiance of the laws of decency. For the first time the evil was reduced to negotiable proportions.

If we read and follow the course of society's

curse through past ages, we may be inclined to comfort ourselves with the reflection that wickedness is past and done away with, but this is far from being the truth as I found out. On the contrary, here in free America conditions exist that have never been surpassed in any age. As the problem faced ages that are past, so it faces us to-day.

In my efforts at driving out criminality from one of the border towns of Chicago I came face to face with some shocking truths. I found that evil and vice as it exists in the small town is not a thing apart, depending on itself, but is actually a small part of a great system.

When I first made an effort to break down the wall of defense of the system which protected evil doers, I found the doors of justice gradually closing against me. I found myself beset by enemies in the most unlooked for situations. In fact, I found that to ask that vice be stamped out was to stand practically

alone unless by continued effort I could arouse sufficient strength of public sentiment to cow public officials into decisive action.

I have been amazed and horrified at the methods employed by these traders in human flesh to entice and induce the innocent and the unwary into the nets spread for their unsuspecting feet. I have watched over and over again our little lost sisters making their first entrée to the speedway of despair. One by one I have noted the causes, the enticements, the inducements, all of them far too carefully planned and laid to be observed by one so unworldly as the poor girl who gets caught. I have censured society in my heart, and justly so. The fate of the girl adrift is to be laid directly at the door of society. Her defeat and destruction is the price society makes her pay.

When the forces of good are brought to bear upon these trappers and wreckers of young

girls, I have watched the means they use to secure immunity and protection. They are safe as safety itself, unless some slip, some accident, happens that occasionally brings one of them to tardy justice. I have seen men held high in public estimation come to the defense of these vultures. I have seen them use every technicality, every unfair advantage, to keep such scoundrels from the prison doors, until my righteous indignation has cried out, "There is no justice in the courts. The laws are framed to shelter thieves. No man gets his just due."

Whispered stories arouse my curiosity. Once more I watch. Again I am confronted with the system. I find that vice is a trust—the most powerful, the most elusive, the most evasive in the world. Not the victim profits, but the exploiters. Not the victim, but the landlords, society parasites, dwellers on the boulevard.

The pay envelopes are labeled for the procurer, the police, the politicians, straight on to the man higher up. Shame does not attend the man who profits from such a source. He is the smugly successful business man of the twentieth century. The girl adrift pays the price. Out of the degradation of her body and the damnation of her soul the fat philanthropist delivers his dole to charity.

I have seen the beginning of temptation come to young officers on the police force in Chicago. I have observed the hardening process that day after day affects conscience. I have watched the indifference grow upon them as their hands seized upon tainted dollars. Gradually the growing income, the increasing comforts and perquisites, completely dominate such natures. Whatever trace of refinement may originally have been seen in their faces becomes lost in the bloating that comes from contact with the monster.

They, too, begin to close down on the girl adrift. They hound her with threats of justice applied, demanding a portion of her revenue on the side.

To-day I am convinced that the procurer, the officer, the keeper, are tools only in the hands of the controllers of the trust. What they reap as benefit comes back to the trust as expenditures through gambling and drink bills collected by the trust. The fortunes are for the wealthy sons of the trust magnates.

I am impressed with the striking difference between the agencies for the destruction and those for the safeguarding of the young. The agencies for safeguarding are scattered and ineffective, while those for destruction are united and nearly infallible. Hence the amazing power of the latter. The agents of the vice trust are always alert. Never in the moments of fatigue, of bitter disappointment and loneliness that overtake the girl adrift,

never is the procurer far away. He is always at hand with a friendly word, offers of companionship, the promise of work.

In one moment of weakness, unsustained by any of the safeguarding agencies, down goes the girl adrift. The doors close behind her. She is forever lost. She has joined that army of little lost sisters.

It is not only the ostensible friend in the hour of need that makes captures. Far more subtle influences are at work to drag in the unsuspecting country girl. Here the methods pursued to bind and hold the innocent are so dastardly as to be almost beyond belief.

I have seen this process, too. I have watched the hounds posing about as the blasé dilettante of a small town, attracting little children. There begins a process of undermining purity and innocence. After this had been accomplished these rascals pushed the

ruined children on and on until there remained but one way to earn their daily bread.

I will tell you the story of little Florence—a little slip of girl, just fourteen. Her father was employed on the many acres owned by the son of one of the foremost families in Chicago. This son, a gentleman in the city, a cur in the country town, never rested until he had Florence in his power. Fearing that his guilt would be discovered and tired of his plaything, he sent her out of the village with a pitifully small sum of money in her pocket.

So she struck out for the city alone—this child of fourteen years, untrained, unprepared, facing an industrial world alone. She sought work, but she could not earn enough to keep body and soul together. One of the women in the place that employed Florence offered to introduce her to a friend who would show her "how to make a living in a simple way."

Thus Florence met the friend—"Watchful Johnny" of the System. The child's labor ceased; her education of bitterness and cruelty was just beginning.

After a time Florence tried to make the wealthy man pay her in money for the terrible price he had extracted from her. In his fear that some of his exclusive associates would publicly ridicule him for his indiscretion, he began to persecute the child through the aid of politics and the use of money.

Time passed and in a few years, driven from one dive to another, Florence died miserably and alone. The work of that son of wealth was complete.

He is only a type after all—an exemplar of the unthinking, the criminally careless, the evilly intent. He and his band keep on contributing to the ranks of the unfortunate, keep swelling the revenues of the masters of social corruption.

Society cannot afford to disregard the truth of the situation. Society dares not look with indifference upon the greatest of social problems which confronts us to-day. The girl adrift is to be reckoned with. Hers is the handicap, hers is the struggle, and hers the cup of bitterness, as she drains it to the dregs.

I know this because I have seen it. I have lived side by side with her as waitress, clerk, or laundress—as toiler of the factory. Why? Because I wanted to know for myself what it is that drums up recruits to the life that is death—because there might be an opportunity to bring to the people at large some suggestion, some insight yet dark, that would spur on greater agitation and rouse greater interest in the abolition of this evil.

MY BATTLES WITH VICE

MY BATTLES WITH VICE

CHAPTER I

A MOTHER'S REQUEST

FROM my mail one morning I picked out a letter written by a woman in Limaville, Illinois, a little town in the southern part of the State with less than three thousand inhabitants. The letter impressed me. It read:

"Dear Miss Brooks:

"I am writing to ask you to help me. Six months ago my little girl ran away from home. I guess she was tired of the farm, tired of washing dishes, tired of being cooped up in

this small town, because in the note she left she said she wanted to see the city, the restaurants, the lights, the shop windows and the people.

"Two weeks after she ran away a postal came. Mary—that is her name—said she had found work in Chicago. She didn't send her address. Maybe she thought we would send after her. We've had no word since then.

"People down here say perhaps Mary's fallen in with those 'white slavers' we read about in the newspapers.

"Miss Brooks, maybe you don't know what a mother's sorrow is. Day and night I am praying to God to send my Mary back to me. If I only knew where to reach her. The thought that maybe she is hungry, sick and suffering is breaking my heart. I am so powerless to help her. Can't you do something? Can't you find her for me? I am

sending you her picture, the one she had taken just before she graduated from the grammar school.

"A broken-hearted mother,
"ELIZA HOLDEN."

The pages of the letter were tear-stained. Poor mother, I thought! What must her anguish be as day after day no word comes to her from Mary? Probably, I imagined, she pictures in her mind each tender memory, each little incident which changed her sweet, rosy baby to a winsome grown-up girl. Probably a thousand times she has shaped her daughter's future; a thousand times pictured her won by the stalwart man of her fancy, only to rouse herself to the truth, the hideous truth—that her Mary was gone. Where? How? And even the gossiping neighbors beginning to whisper—"white slavers!"

"White slavers!" How often of late I had

heard the phrase. I didn't know then as I know now that a great system of white slavery existed. I didn't know then that the system had ramifications extending throughout the entire country, and that these ramifications are to be found in the most unlooked for, the most unbelievable places. I didn't know then that its supporters are men and women high in social and political life.

For many months I had been receiving letters from mothers in all parts of the country asking me to lend my aid in locating their lost daughters. Most of the letters said that the girl had gone to the city and then nothing more had been heard of her.

Perhaps these girls had fallen a prey to the System! Mary Holden, perhaps she, too,— It couldn't be! I sprang to my feet. Something told me to go out and seek the truth, to enter the city's industrial life and strip the veil of mystery surrounding the pitfalls, the

dark and devious alleyways through which girls disappear. I determined to drive from its hiding place the grim specter of commercialized, trust controlled vice, and to restore Mary Holden to her mother.

CHAPTER II

I FIND WORK AS A WAITRESS

WHEN I decided to get my information by actual contact with conditions that affect girls coming to the city, and especially working girls, I was puzzled for a time as to the means of getting a job.

My first efforts to secure a place as waitress in downtown restaurants were not very successful. I had scraped up an acquaintance with several girls employed in restaurants, and to them I communicated my desire to work. One of them was rather a pretty child named Linny Smith. She wore a yard or more of puffs and seemed to me on first impression to be about half hair, but she was very good hearted and anxious to help me.

"The trouble with you, Kid," she confided, " is that you ain't got no style to you. Look at the way you've got your hair on."

"What's the matter with it?" I inquired with deep humility.

"Matter with it?" she retorted with disgust. "Get some puffs and doll yourself up."

On reflection I decided that her advice about the puffs was sound from several points of view.

In the first place, I did not want to be recognized, which would make my work of no avail, and in the second place my too placid aspect did really seem to have a deterrent effect on the employer of help. So I bought some puffs and trained them down over my forehead with an effect so extraordinary that I at once concluded the disguise to be absolutely safe.

The next day I tried several more places and failed again, but the more I tried and failed the more determined I was to be a waitress.

I wanted to experience for myself from day to day all the advantages and disadvantages connected with the occupation. I had no experience, you see, and already I was beginning to realize the struggle a girl must go through when she has had no preparation for entry into the fields of industry. I wanted to find out what the opportunities of such a girl were—what praise or blame or pleasure or humiliation might be hers.

So I persisted, and at last I succeeded. Linny Smith had offered me daily hints as to how I might, from her experienced point of view, improve my appearance and thus stand a better chance of getting work.

My first chance came at one of the big stores. I entered the employment bureau of this place and found a long line of girls standing before the superintendent's desk. The line had been waiting, I found, over two hours. I stepped into place at the end of the line.

"Gee," said a rather pretty looking girl who had the place ahead of me, "we ain't got as much show as a pair of pink eyed rabbits in a den of snakes."

The child had a pinched, tired look, but there was a half-whimsical expression on her face—the ghost of a smile.

"After a clerking job?" asked the girl ahead.

"No, I want to be a waitress," I said. "Haven't had any experience at clerking."

"Not for mine," said the child. "I've got to get a clerk's job, and it's got to pay seven a week, because I've got my mother and sister to keep."

Just then a porter came out of an inner office and began looking over the girls in the row. He picked out the girl ahead and me and beckoned to us.

"You two can step in," he said.

The little girl ahead shrank back. I did not comprehend it then, but did later.

"You go on in," she said to me. "I've lost my nerve."

I stepped into the office and a gruff voice ordered me to give my name, address, what sort of a job I wanted, and my letters of reference.

I explained that I had no letter of reference, but that I could give him the name of a responsible person to call on the telephone.

"Nothing doing," said the man. "Suppose I've got nothing to do but call people on the telephone?"

I mumbled some sort of apology with flaming cheeks. The man told me to get my letter of recommendation and then call again.

I hurried out of the office. The young girl who had "lost her nerve" met me outside. She seemed to have been crying. She grasped my arm and led me to one side.

"What did he say, Kid? Any chance?" she questioned.

I told her about the letter of recommendation and her face fell.

"I knew it," she said, sadly. "You know how it is—I can't get a letter of recommendation that would hold a spoonful of water. No show for me in there. Well, good-by."

I asked the girl for her name and address, and she gave them to me. Afterward I visited her several times, but she has given up her ambition to be a clerk. Poor child!

I was passing the line of girls near the manager's office making my way out of the place, when one of the weariest of the weary gathering called out to me:

"Girlie! Looking for a job? If you are, hurry upstairs and see Miss Nixon. She wants a girl for the quick-lunch counter. Hustle along and you can nick it."

A few minutes later I was upstairs inquiring for the forewoman of the restaurant. The person who came forward was fat and im-

posing. Again I was plied with questions and given an application blank to fill out. The scrutiny of that blank was not very close. They needed a girl at once. The ordeal was over. I was accepted. My hours were from 11 A. M. to 3 P. M. and from 4.30 to 8 P. M. The pay was $4.50 a week for the morning work and 50 cents extra for work at night.

Now there is a vast difference between seeing a thing done and actually doing it one's self. You may think you can sense a situation fully from observation, but that is a fallacy. Do the thing yourself, and in a few minutes you get a viewpoint that you had not supposed could exist.

I had often wondered how it felt to shift heavy trays loaded with dishes backward and forward from a kitchen to a table perhaps five or six rods away. I had watched waitresses, flushed and perspiring, hurrying to

serve impatient customers. Now I was in the thick of it myself.

"Annie Tate—waitress." That was my name on my first step toward the mysteries of the underworld in the search for Mary Holden.

It was already 11 o'clock, so the forewoman put me at work immediately on "instructions." First I was told to serve the hot drinks, then collect the checks, then deposit the checks in the cash box and bring back the sandwiches.

This method was employed so that customers could not cheat the store. One check paid for the drink and the sandwich.

Then I was taken out to the kitchen. There I saw several red-armed young girls washing dishes in boiling suds that I afterward found contained some sort of chemical for cutting grease. The chemical was so strong that the girls soon became incapacitated from the inflammation it caused.

The poor girls seemed to have a hopeless sort of task. One of them was very pretty—the only one who spoke to me. I asked her if she couldn't get a better job than that, and she said that if she worked outside people would see her. She preferred to be in the kitchen. As I left her to go back to the counter she surprised me by paraphrasing Kipling's Sergeant Mulvaney with the whimsical remark: "I was a school teacher wanst, but no matther."

I decided to see more of that girl later, and I did. She will be heard from again in the course of my story. I noticed that this girl washed her dishes very carefully, but the others seemed to have no desire to do more than keep making motions.

A minute later I was working at the counter. The noon-hour rush was just beginning. Four girls beside myself and a head waitress were running back and forth trying to serve

the customers, who all wanted to be served at once. Most of the patronage seemed to consist of shopgirls and clerks of various grades.

It was a scrambled phantasmagoria of "Ham on rye," "Cheese on white," "Ham on white," "Hurry up the checks," "Get out of my road."

The head waitress was perpetually prodding the girls on to greater effort. At first they seemed to respond with alacrity, but as time passed they grew rude and ugly, resenting the constant nagging with remarks of their own that one would never have suspected they knew how to make. As the hours went by I realized what a desperately hard life this waitress work is. I found the turmoil and hustling almost unbearable, but it was my job, so I stuck to it like a leech.

The balls of my feet ached horribly. The bones of my face and head began to pain me. I remarked this to a pale, thin woman who was

sitting at the end of the counter. I brought her an order of milk and apple pie. She appeared to be in a state of intense nervous excitement, and I asked her if she felt tired.

"Tired!" she blurted out. "Say, I'm beginning to believe I can't die."

The woman told me she was sewing on children's rompers for some tailoring firm. She said she had to work in a little room with five women, and there was only enough air for two.

"I've got a little boy, and he's a cripple," she confided. "I suppose that is why the Lord won't let me die."

I asked her why she didn't eat something more digestible than pie, and she replied that she had become used to eating quickly, and pie was the quickest lunch she could get.

Just then the bell rang for us to go to our luncheon, and the tired, thin woman dragged herself away. Lunch was served free to em-

ployees of the counter. I ate very little, but seized the opportunity to go out for a breath of fresh air. There were two girls outside from another department. One of them spoke to me, and after we had conversed a few minutes I asked her where she lived.

"Me and Mame's living in a vaudeville house out South, and we're studyin' for the stage," she said. "There's a fellow there fixing up a turn for us. Pretty soon we'll be going on the road."

I returned to the counter for the afternoon shift feeling somewhat refreshed. I determined to observe more closely the details of the place. The four kinds of sandwiches were divided into two lots and placed at each end of the counter. Ham on white and rye bread were at one end and the cheese sandwiches at the other.

The tanks holding the liquids were placed in the center and a shelf under the counter for

cups placed them in a difficult position. The counter was arranged without a thought for the girls who worked at it. Unnecessary steps the length of the counter were required. The constant reaching for those badly placed cups caused my knees to ache fearfully. I thought of suggesting a change in the location of the materials to be served, but I spoke to one of the girls about it and she said: "For Gawd's sake, tell that to Barney; I'd like to notice whether she'd give you time to get your hat."

Then for a few minutes the girl became confidential, and I felt sorry for her, poor thing. She told me she kept house for her father, brother and nephew, being motherless. They were trying to get a home together, she said.

"The work is hard here," I remarked.

"Hard here?" she snorted. "Why, I got up at six this morning and did the whole family wash, and my slob of a brother refused to

straighten the kitchen so that I could get a few minutes' rest before I came down here."

"You ought to make them help you," I ventured.

"Say," she answered, "you don't know. I'm English and Englishmen make truck horses of their women."

The clerks and working girls I had seen were coming back now for their supper. Their orders were not very much. Five cents for lunch and ten cents for supper—sandwich, coffee, and pie, the evening extravagance. They lived on that fare for weeks and months at a time until their stomachs revolted and they had doctors' bills to pay. This crisis in their lives was variously met. I am coming to that later. Poor little girls with their pasty faces and pale lips!

I went into the kitchen with a plate to hold out for my supper. The cook reached into a tin and pulled out a piece of meat with his

fingers, slapping it on the plate. He reached again and slapped a handful of mashed potatoes beside the meat. I fled. It was time to go to the cashier for my fifty cents extra. The cashier was a girl of about twenty. She was cross and irritable. She spoke insultingly to girls but her insults did not stop there. I saw a woman customer step up to the cage and heard her ask if the dining-room was closed.

"Yes," said the cashier.

The woman made a petulant remark.

"Why the —— don't you do your cooking at home?" demanded the cashier, as the customer shrank away.

Well, it is all in the point of view. When I reached home and had immersed myself in a porcelain tub I began to recover.

My self-respect returned in leaps and bounds. I realized what an important part environment plays in the matter of self-respect. I wondered how long I could keep mine work-

ing under such conditions as those of my first working day. Suppose I had been compelled to return to a chilly, ill-furnished room instead of to a cheery, harmonious household and a sympathetic mother?

It isn't invariably the costume of the woman of fashion or the blazing resplendent show window that tempts the girl adrift. It is more often just the human need for love and shelter —the lack of a friendly hand-clasp that shall lighten to-morrow's labor—the sympathy and understanding that breed hope.

CHAPTER III

I BECOME A CLERK

I SUPPOSE I was not a very competent waitress. At all events my employers did not seem particularly impressed with the value of my services. In a few days I was looking for another job. My position was the same on the surface as that in which thousands of incompetent girls find themselves every day—but most of them haven't good homes to go to when they are out of work.

It was purely by luck that I obtained my second place. I was engaged to clerk in a large department store during the Christmas rush season. My place was in the basement. Several girls had fallen out of the ranks the night before I was engaged. Another girl told me they "had to get Christmas money."

I was turned over to a floor walker, who demonstrated the cash register, told me qualities and prices of goods and other things. Then I was ordered to go to the rest room and hang up my hat.

The rest room struck me as rather a joke. It was 10 by 20 feet and crowded with girls. A table covered with oilcloth ran along one side of it. The girls were eating sandwiches and pie. On a dilapidated couch in a corner of the room lay a girl who was crying from headache. Nobody paid any attention to her. A very slovenly matron was in attendance. All the coat hangers were full, so I climbed on a locker and found a niche for my things. From this point I also discovered that there were no outside windows—just holes cut for ventilation. The air that came through these holes was from the basement. It was drawn down by an electric fan, and, moreover, it was very foul.

The floor walker again took charge of me and showed me my counter. It was a doll counter, upon which all sorts of dolls, books, and games were placed. After once entering the counter the clerk is not permitted to leave without a pass from the floor walker.

The girl in charge of the counter was called Lil. I have never encountered so peculiar a personality. Her face was lacquered with whitewash and her hair, under a net, was oiled, twisted and flat. Her bangs were shaped into "spit" curls and plastered flat to her forehead. Her face was without a vestige of expression. She was rather nice in her manner to me, possibly because I said little to her.

I watched this girl closely in order to get a line on what I must do. She spoke quite softly to me, but she continually cursed the other girls, calling them horrible names under

her breath. I don't know why she did this; there did not seem to be any reason for it. She spoke in tones just low enough to escape the ear of the floor walker.

A small girl named Maud, about sixteen years old, waited at my end of the counter next to me. She was soiled and tousled—so slouchy that I wondered how she managed to get work. I asked her if this was her first job and her reply was illuminating.

"Naw," she grinned. "I've had thirty jobs so far in my sweet young life—factories and mail order houses are my meat."

I must have looked at her commiseratingly, because her old-young face took on an expression that seemed more human as she leaned toward me and said:

"I'm engaged, Kid—but don't spill it."

I tried to hustle about in that place and see what enterprise could do toward gaining ap-

proval from the "great chief,"—our floor walker. My efforts made no impression on him at all.

"What's the good working for him?" said little Maud. "Why, that guy's got to come down all hours of the day and night to clean up and mark goods. He's all to the winky blink. It don't make no difference to him whether you live or die, because he is so near dead himself."

The crowds increased toward the noon hour. The basement became almost intolerable—hot, close and seething with chatter. I was afraid I might not be able to stand it and was very much relieved when the bell rang for luncheon.

I hurried into the dressing room and was clambering on the locker after my things when I felt some one take hold of my hand and turned around to see a rather smart-looking fellow about twenty standing beside me.

"Kid," he began, "come on. I'll blow you to the beans."

"Thanks," I answered, "beans don't agree with me."

"Shoot the beans," he persisted. "Lady Vere can order patty de fossy gras and joy bubbles if she wants 'em."

Again I refused the invitation. He went away very angry.

"Believe me, Kid," he called back, over his shoulder, "you'll get tired of paying for lunches on your rake-off."

I told one of the girls about this episode and she stared at me unbelievingly.

"Why, you fool," she whispered, "he's related to one of the bosses upstairs and he's got money to burn a city with. It was the chance of your life."

Then she motioned for me to step into a corner, and in a whisper she continued: "Why, that fellow treated a girl so nice down

here, that she just got up and quit. Some of the girls say that he is supporting her. He sure did buy her fine clothes."

"And what was the girl's name?" I inquired.

"Mary," she replied.

"Mary—Mary what?" I asked eagerly.

"Mary Holden."

"Mary Holden," I repeated.

"Yes."

I remained quite stunned for a few moments. Indeed, I was on the track of the missing girl. She had worked here in this store. And the flippant youth? He had bought her clothes, and dinners! I hurried out of the building. I had so much to think over, and I was so fatigued. I needed food and air, and a place to think.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST CLEW

I RETURNED to the store, my mind fully made up to find Mary and to make the over-dressed youth tell me her address. As I entered the basement the place rang with rough conversation relating to dance hall orgies in which some of the girls had participated.

Maud, my small companion of the counter, sat silent in a corner, drinking in the talk. Maud was getting her ideas of deportment, ideals of conduct, notions of life. She was getting them in a dangerous school. By the time they reached her they were twisted out of respectable recognition. Here was a girl adrift receiving impressions.

My time was up. I returned to work. The

girls seemed quite friendly. Maud came back to the counter and in a childish way she put her arm around my waist.

"You for me, Doll," she smiled.

Nobody ever tried to find out my real name. I was either "Doll," "Kid," "Flossie," or "Flip." It simplified matters a great deal, because I several times forgot names I had given and was afraid of being confronted with my own perfidy.

There was a great deal of dissension between Maud and Lil. The two hurled oaths at each other that could not be improved on by any longshoreman my imagination can conjure.

Maud told me that Lil was a "rounder, and no —— good."

"Say," the child confided, "that wedding ring the tramp is wearing is phony. She got it at a 5 cent store. She ain't never married long."

Customers were crowding round the counters, pushing, jostling, shouting their wants. It was pandemonium. The constant running back and forth and high reaching for shelf goods made me deathly tired. I brought into play muscles I seemed never to have used before.

Then there was the string. Tyros can't break string properly. It is a knack one has to learn. I had a deep raw groove in the under side of my little finger from breaking string. I suppose somebody could have taught me to do the trick correctly in five minutes, but nobody did.

"Move along there, Flip."

I looked around and saw a new girl behind the counter. She said she'd been put on the job with me. Here was the most persistent questioner I had yet encountered. She was very slim-waisted, graceful in a certain reptilian way, and her hair was piled high with

puffs. I think she had been a brunette, but if so she had quarreled with Providence.

"My name's Sadie," volunteered my new friend. "Say, where do you live, Kid? You don't look like you traveled the route."

I mumbled something about living at Chicago Avenue and North Clark Street, and she rapped out a remark that it was a "tough corner."

"What do you get a week?" pursued Sadie, breezing along in her offhand way.

"Only $6 now," I answered.

"How are you going to live on that?" she demanded.

"Well," I sighed hypocritically, "it will mean going without many things."

"Oh, yes, it will," snapped Sadie. "Go without nothing you can. See these."

"These" flashed for an instant as Sadie executed a rather daring kick. They were "near-silk."

"I got them from a guy last night," the girl went on. "Don't let nothing get away from you that you can grab. Say, dearie, it's easy. Get a guy and ring him up for a five. Can you dance?"

"Yes," I confessed, "but a girl doesn't get much chance to go anywhere when she is a stranger."

"Aw, sure you can," grinned Sadie, amazed at my simplicity. "Say, Kid, I'll take you to Dreamland. It won't cost us a cent if we make a killing. There's always a bunch of guys around there and it's dead easy to date up."

"What is dating up?" I pleaded.

"Greener than the green hills," muttered Sadie, *sotto voce*. Then she added, aloud: "By Gee. I'm goin' to give you the time of your life, Kid. You gotta be wised up. Get on the job," she hissed in conclusion. "Here comes the devil."

I looked around. Mooney, the floor walker, was approaching. Sadie said he was picking out the girls to be discharged and the ones to be retained at the close of that day's work.

"Doesn't the store give any notice?" I asked. "I cannot afford to be without work."

"Raus mittum," laughed Sadie. "If they tie a tin to us we'll both go over to the mail order. Say! See that yellow-haired fellow over there? He's asked me out to lunch, but he frames like a piker. Anyway, it's thirty-five cents in my kick and I'll let him spend it. Here's some gum. Don't let Mooney see you looking cow-eyed—gum ain't allowed. So long, Kid; see you after supper."

I watched Sadie's lithe form and her too blonde head with its flashing crystal set combs as she undulated through the throng and disappeared. I turned back to my work. There stood Mooney. Lil was watching him closely.

The other girls eyed him with painful intensity. He just stood and looked at us a moment and then passed on. That settled it, Lil said. Not one of us had been chosen to stay on. There would be a new crew after Christmas.

"The stiff!" Lil snorted—"and me down here working over hours packing goods. Well, it's back to the mail order for mine. If I'd known I wasn't going to stick I'd have gone to the dance with the bunch to-night. Say! You ought to see my regular do the trot!"

A comical expression grew on her white-washed face and she wiggled her shoulders, first one, then the other, contorting her body grotesquely as she sang under her breath: "It's a bear—it's a bear—it's a bear." An instant later she was holding her hand over her heart and gasping: "My God, I'm all in, Kid. I couldn't trot ner nothin' else to-night."

I looked up and noticed that the flippant youth, son of one of the bosses upstairs, was standing at my counter eyeing me closely. I had something to say to him.

He spoke first.

"Hello, Kid."

"Hello," I retorted.

"Sorry you couldn't take me up this noon," he continued. "We might have had a fine feed." He smiled and showed his imperfect teeth.

"I don't know you well enough for that," I said.

"Oh, introductions are not necessary here. Why, one Kid who worked here treated me right, and, say, I couldn't do enough for her."

"That girl was Mary Holden." Even now I don't know what made me blurt out the name.

"How did you know?" he demanded, slightly taken back.

"Oh, she told me," I answered. "I wish I knew where I could find her. We are good friends, you know."

"Is that so. I'll tell you where she is." He looked around to see if anybody was watching. Then he took a note-book from his pocket and obligingly read off an address for me which I jotted down.

"You'll find her there," he laughed. "Give her my best." And he walked off, favoring me with a wink of his bloodshot eye.

I looked at the address and could hardly believe my eyes. The number and street was in one of the most questionable parts of the city. Poor Mary Holden—poor little girls adrift!

It was the night before Christmas. And misery was all about me. How my heart ached for those countless, motherless, homeless girls about me. Some of them never survived the strain of that Christmas season.

They wanted to give. They did give—too much.

Shoppers were heartless. In haste to secure service before the stores closed they raved and threatened. From one side of the counter to the other I worked. It was like a nightmare. The cut under my little finger was bleeding badly. I cried whenever I tried to break string. My feet throbbed. Some of the girls were in their stocking feet—it was impossible to stand the pressure of shoes.

I looked up. There stood the girl I had seen that first day while looking for work. She had on a new hat and coat.

"Merry Christmas," she cried. "I came over just to wish it to you."

"And Merry Christmas to you, dear," I answered. The child looked at me pitifully and her eyes fell. She was crying. An instant later she pointed at the hat and coat she wore

and stepped back to show me new shoes and stockings.

"I've got money now," she sobbed, "but no Merry Christmas, girlie—they got my number all right."

Before I could say another word she was gone. That night I wept myself to sleep. The bells were ringing out "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men." Poor little girl adrift!

CHAPTER V

NELLIE DALY'S MEAL TICKET

THE boarding-house keepers of large cities are often the world's most practical humanitarians. The stout woman, sometimes of a forbidding aspect, whose portly presence strikes terror into the heart of the little girl seeking work and a place to live in an unknown town, is often the girl's best friend and her readiest resource in the time of stress.

It is true that there are always societies and organizations to which the girl out of work may appeal for assistance if she is lucky enough to know where they are, or even to be aware of their existence at all, but what the girl needs when she is depressed with hunger and her power of resistance to the "man with

the dinner" is weakened by deprivation, is some big-hearted soul on the spot with a bowl of hot soup and a kind word.

I credit the rooming-house and boarding-house keepers with having saved many souls.

Here is a case that will illustrate my point. I am thinking of little Nellie Daly, a sixteen-year-old child possessed of that extraordinary beauty which comes of mixing the Irish and Scandinavian races. Nellie's mother was a wonderful blonde and her father a black-haired West-of-Ireland man.

Nellie had the long, dark lashes and blue-gray eyes of her father and great masses of golden-blond hair like her mother. She was slight of stature, but her figure was perfect.

This child appealed to me when I met her for the first time. She was employed in an envelope addressing department of a mail order concern and her pay was $5 a week. Her room was in a house on Indiana Street, right

in the middle of what used to be a particularly disreputable district before they began cleaning out the dives of that locality. But Nellie's boarding-house keeper, Mrs. McCarthy, was a motherly soul.

Nellie paid $2 for her room. That left her $3 to live on, dress on and pay for all other necessaries and amusements. Nellie's people were in the theatrical line. At the time I met her the father had been ill and both parents were having a hard time of it in some town on the southern circuit, where they had become stranded.

One day, in a burst of confidence, Nellie told me that her meal ticket cost $3. Putting two and two together I realized that my little friend was spending her whole income just to eat and sleep. I wondered how she paid for her washing. That is why I called on good-hearted Mrs. McCarthy one Sunday morning to have a little chat with her.

"The Lord only knows what'll become of the poor baby," said Mrs. McCarthy, as we stood in the door of a little two by twice apartment on the fourth floor of her house.

Inside I saw Nellie's tousled blonde head half buried in a pillow. Her face had the look that comes upon a child's face after she has cried herself to sleep.

"She's the lucky girl to be where she is right now," whispered Mrs. McCarthy, "because 'Bull' Tevis is after her these three weeks. Saturday she was getting ready to go out with him when I happened up here with a plate of stew that was left over from dinner.

"She lied to me first, and then I made her eat the stew, and when she'd eaten it she just threw her arms round me and cried so she shook from her toes to the top of her head—the poor darlin'."

"Who is Tevis?" I ventured.

"Don't you know the scout that has been up

twice already for runnin' girls into them holes out South? I told the child about him the first time he showed his face at this door to call for her. She said she'd never been out with him, but he always wanted to take her to dinner.

"And after she ate the stew she took off her hat and then while I sat with her she took off her little best shoes and stockings and sat there barefoot wrigglin' her toes.

"'Mother McCarthy,' she says, 'I ain't never been out with Tevis and I ain't never going out with him, but I know one of the girls that has been out with him, and she says he buys swell things to eat. But I'm not hungry no more now, Mother McCarthy, God bless you,' she says, 'so hang Tevis,' she says.

"Then I sat and visited with her and petted her till she went to sleep just like you see her now, and right glad I am I come up with

that plate of stew. Before she went to sleep she told me how she was living. It'd make your heart ache to hear her.

"Five dollars a week, you see. There's two for the room—and God knows I've got to have the money or I can't have a roof over her or me neither.

"Well, the meal ticket she buys costs $3, and she told me how she had been making one meal ticket last two weeks. They got out some new-fangled kind of a ticket that had funny ornamental didoes on to one end of it.

"About the middle of the second week poor Nellie lost track of how many meals she had eaten, and it wasn't until Friday night that she found out those didoes wasn't meals. Then she tried to stay in bed from Friday to Monday when she had four days' pay coming. They'd laid her off Thursday night. Saturday morning Tevis called and wanted to have her meet him in Clark Street. That poor

dear was so hungry by then she was going to take a chance with the snake charmer for just one dinner. But she's all right now."

I have told the tale of Nellie Daly and good Mrs. McCarthy because there are thousands of Nellies and, I am thankful to say, hundreds of Mrs. McCarthys in Chicago, and, in fact, every large city.

From statistics I have gathered it is perfectly certain to me that the most valuable first aid to morality in Chicago or any other big city is the boarding-house woman. Often she either has or has had sons or daughters of her own. She is generally poor and often hard beset with the problems of life on her own account, but in nine cases out of ten she will tide the poor girl lodging in her house over a crisis like that which confronted Nellie Daly.

Often these good women carry girls through unemployment for weeks without security and

for no reasons whatever except those of humanity. The boarding-house woman doesn't ask a million questions about the girl who comes to her door. She takes the girl in and gives her a bed and finds out what chance she has to pay afterwards.

CHAPTER VI

"BULL" TEVIS

I WANT to refer to the type that "Bull" Tevis represents. This man I happen to know. He tried to get me to join him at dinner one evening while I was working as a clerk in a downtown department store.

Tevis has an ingratiating manner. It might almost be attractive if one hadn't happened to find out what the man is. Tevis has a great deal of very dark hair that curls low on his forehead. He has a smile that often attracts poor girls who haven't anybody to smile on them and whose days are spent under the perpetual nagging of the "bawler out."

Tevis has little, dark, beady eyes like a rat; his jaw is a trifle undershot. His clothes are

always natty and he wears a diamond in his scarf. Tevis has about four to five hundred girls in the downtown district on his "mark-down" list. His methods are subtle—educational, one might say. He buys several fine dinners, I understand, before showing his fangs. He is careful not to flush the game until he has pretty well barred the avenues of escape. He has established a state of friendship which permits him to lend the girl money, demanding nothing in return—a "brotherly-love" sort of loan.

Why, I have heard girls swear by this man. I have had a perfectly good girl stand and plead with me, tears in her eyes, not to misjudge Tevis, because she knew him and knew him for one of the best men God ever made.

But Tevis always collects—always. When a girl gets so involved that she doesn't know which way to turn, Tevis is ever on hand to show her a way out.

Tevis' "way out" is merely one of the ingenious ramifications of the System that leads further in. In the end the girl disappears completely from haunts that knew her, and the work of Tevis is complete. Little girl adrift! What chance has she against these subtly trained and carefully groomed servants of the System? If they cannot get her one way they will another, and the whole strength of the organization protects the procurers. Society's scattered forces resist feebly, but the System moves safely and surely to a definite end.

Indirectly I discovered that "Bull" Tevis had Mary Holden's name on his "watch list." I had not forgotten the street and number where that flashily dressed youth in the department store basement told me Mary lived. I decided to try my luck. Little did I realize what a task it would be to rescue the girl.

In a taxicab I was driven up to the address

which was in the most questionable part of Chicago.

"So this is where Mary lives," I soliloquized. "I can't believe it."

Up a rickety flight of stairs I walked. I rang the bell on the door. The house had the customary red front of houses in that locality. The door was opened by a large colored woman, who peered out at me cautiously.

"Is Mary in?" I asked.

"Who are you?" demanded the woman, evading my question.

"I'm an old friend," I answered, slipping a five dollar note into her hand.

"Come in," she said slyly. "I'll get Mary for you."

I entered the house and the woman told me to wait in the parlor while she went upstairs for Mary.

I sat in one of the high-backed rose-velvet chairs. In a glance I had taken in the con-

tents of the room with its cheap oil paintings of nude art, the gilded wicker chairs, and its heavy Battenberg draperies, all of which betrayed the character of the house. I looked up. Down the staircase came a girl. Her face, pale, save for the rouge, and black penciling, stood out in high relief against the shadows that played up and down the hall.

"You came to see me?" she started. "Who are you and what do you want with me?"

"I want to help you," I replied.

"I don't need any help."

"Perhaps you do?"

"Not from strangers, anyway," she retorted, as if fearful to commit herself.

Her eyes looked into mine.

"I never saw you before in my life," she said suspiciously.

"That does not matter," I returned. "I want to get you out of this place."

"You can't. We're watched." She glanced over her shoulder cautiously.

"Tell me your name?" I asked, in a friendly manner. "Tell me your real, honest name, the one your mother calls you by," I pleaded.

A spasm of pain crossed the girl's face. I had hit upon the right chord.

"It is Mary," she whispered.

"Mary Holden?" I demanded.

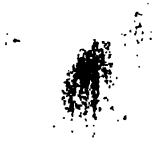
"How did you know?"

"Because I have come from your mother. I wrote to her and promised I would bring her little girl back to her." I looked around the room. "We must get out of here," I continued.

"My mother? Where is she?" she asked with eagerness.

"Back in Limaville, waiting for you, longing to hold you in her arms again."

The girl quivered. Her large brown eyes filled with tears.



"They won't let me go," she sobbed. "If I only could go—"

"Quick," I said, "I'll get you out."

I started out into the hall followed by Mary. I noiselessly turned the knob, threw open the door, and came face to face with "Bull" Tevis.

"What's the game, Kid?" he said to me, blocking our exit with his arms. He sensed the situation.

"We wanted a little air, that's all," I replied.

"So that's it, is it? You ——" and a curse fell from his lips. "You'll not get her." He rushed forward to strike Mary. His upheld fist was about to descend upon her head when I tripped him and he sprawled out upon the floor. In an instant he was on his feet. He made after me. One hand catching my throat, he forced me back into the corner.

"I'm going to get you, and get you good," he muttered in a guttural tone.

Mary saw her opportunity and availed her-

self of it. She fled through the open front door and disappeared.

Tevis held me tight in his grasp.

"You'll not get away so easily," he sneered.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE CAFÉ SINISTER

TEVIS was about to strike me with his fist. He stepped forward; and then he stepped back. He might have accomplished his purpose had not a new actor appeared in this thrilling drama. The flippant youth, who had given me Mary's address in the department store basement, entered from a side room.

"'Bull,'" said the youth, "what's up?"

"This Kid got noisy and—"

The young man stood staring at me.

"What! do you know her?" asked Tevis. "Who is she, Bill?"

Without answering Tevis, Bill walked over to me with an outstretched hand. I avoided it.

"Hello, Kid," he said. "Glad to see you again. Is Tevis trying to scare you?" Then he turned to Tevis: "Easy, easy, I say. This Kid is all to the mustard."

"Good day, gentlemen," I said, and to my surprise I was permitted to leave the house.

During that day I tried in vain to get a trace of Mary. That evening I met Lil, and we decided to visit the Café Sinister.

The waiter wore a shouting red necktie with a diamond as big as a filbert sparkling from its folds. His face had the par-boiled appearance that characterizes complexions among the male habitués of the levee. He smiled ingratiatingly at Lil and me.

We were among the early arrivals at the Café Sinister, than which there is no more spectacularly gilded, no more brilliantly lighted hall of evil fame within the System's sphere of influence.

Lil had agreed to show me the sights—

to direct the process of getting me "wised-up."

I had never in my life before worn such clothes as I wore that night, nor such a hat. The former was a semi-decolleté of vivid wine color, and the latter sported huge black plumes that made me feel topheavy. Lil waxed momentarily enthusiastic over my appearance and insisted that I was a "bear," but she seemed very tired.

A dozen or more couples sat about at scattered tables. Some of the girls far outshone me in decorative extravagance, so I did not, perhaps, appear as conspicuous as I felt.

There were several entertainers lounging about the place. A self-possessed youth with a long dark cowlick that constantly fell over his eyes and had to be shaken back, sang a ballad and looked at me right in the eyes as he did so, but the ballad was sentimental and

the habitués of the place did not like it. A big blonde woman sitting alone at a table remarked stridently that it was too early for that "home and mother" stuff.

At another table—the one nearest our own—sat a girl of about eighteen, a pretty, dark-haired, sloe-eyed child with a flushed face. Beside her was a gray-haired man. His eyes were nearly closed, but he proved to be wide awake when anything happened to attract his attention. The girl was humming little snatches of a café song with a ragtime refrain, beating time on the table top with the rim of a wine glass. I thought the girl did not look well. I spoke to Lil about her.

"Pie-eyed," was my companion's terse comment. "She ain't going to last the evening out."

The jeweled waiter brought two glasses of some dark liquid Lil had ordered. Lil said

the drinks were "ginger ale highballs." I tasted mine and it was vile. It burned my throat as it went down.

I continued to observe the pretty girl and the gray-haired man at the other table. The man might have been the girl's father. He was certainly old enough. I noticed that he drank little but often filled the girl's glass from a silver-topped bottle.

A young fellow who looked like a chauffeur in his puttees and a cap came in and spoke to the gray-haired man, who shook his head and the chauffeur went outside again. Just then the gray-haired man caught Lil's eye and nodded to her. She gave him a little wave of her glove in return.

"Who is that man?" I asked.

"Say, Kid," Lil whispered, "take it from me, he's a heller. That's Ike—'Gray Ike,' they call him. Know what he's doing with that little doll? Buyin' her wine, see. Know

who's payin' for it? Him! Not Ike. Not in ten thousand years, Kid—she is."

"But he paid for the last bottle," I declared. "I saw him get the change."

"Kid," yawned the sophisticated Lil, patting her gaping jaws with her hand, "Kid, that's just an investment for quick returns. It ain't his coin, see? He's a trailer for the gang. He'll get all that back and a bundle besides when he turns her over."

Soon I heard hysterical sobbing. Turning quickly, I saw that the dark-haired girl was crying. She had a crumpled handkerchief pressed to her eyes with both hands. The gray-haired man had risen and was shaking her by the shoulders.

"Come out of it," he ordered sharply. "Come out of that, now—you're all right."

The girl took the handkerchief from her eyes and turned up a tear-stained face to laugh at the man.

"Ain't I the little fool?" the girl giggled—"ain't I the limit for a fool? Say!"

But the girl was soon crying again, and I saw the chauffeur again standing in the background. The girl began wailing aloud. She tried to rise and staggered. I thought I heard her say, "I want to go to mother."

The gray-haired man nodded to the chauffeur. The waiter with the diamond came forward, and the three men half carried, half dragged the dark-haired girl toward the door. She struggled and fought.

Just then the orchestra struck up a popular ragtime air. The fat blonde woman at the table on the other side began singing. The girl kept screaming. For an instant I forgot my part, standing up from the chair with an indignant exclamation. Lil seized my wrist and dragged me back with an oath.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT HAPPENED TO MAIZIE

"YOU little fool," whispered Lil, fiercely—"think you're going to butt in on that stunt?"

"But they are taking her away," I almost screamed. "They're just dragging her."

"Say," snapped my companion, "don't you try to do any reforming around here—not in a joint like this, Kid. If you take care of yourself you'll have all you can look after."

"But that poor girl," I gasped.

"It's a red kimono for hers, and not much else. Do you get me?" Lil replied. "You couldn't help her if you howled all night, so here's how."

Lil drained her glass and I saw her shiver. It may have been the liquor. I shivered, too,

when she made me drink mine, but, strange to say, it did not affect me otherwise. I was too much excited. Outside I heard the horn of a taxicab.

The waiter came over to fill our glasses and I thought he stared rather queerly at me as he said:

"Maizie's pickled to the gills, the little fool. Beats all how good he is to her, too —buys her everything her heart could wish for, but she will souse. Guess they're goin' to California to-morrow."

Lil grinned sardonically.

"Crazy about California, ain't he?" she remarked. "Makes about four trips a year, don't he?"

"Well, you see, some people can't stand these winters in Chi," laughed the waiter.

The farewell wail of that little girl adrift, gone away in the taxi with the sleepy-eyed,

gray-haired man rang in my ears. I wanted to leave the place then, thinking I had seen enough, but Lil wouldn't go.

"Here's a couple of guys," she whispered. "They're just rounders from a hotel. String 'em along."

Two well dressed men approached, bowed to us and on Lil's acknowledgment seated themselves at our table. One seemed about forty-five years old. I thought the other was rather younger.

"Waiting at the church, girls?" inquired the elder man jocosely.

"Studyin' types for a novel," retorted Lil, with such readiness that I shot a glance at her painted, expressionless face to see whether she had discovered me. But no, it was Lil's little gift of repartee.

"How're you suited, then?" inquired the younger man, good naturedly.

"You'll do," laughed Lil. "Say, this place is like a morgue to-night. Why don't somebody start something?"

The younger of the two men clapped his hands and a waiter hurried across the floor. I whispered to the waiter that I wasn't feeling well and that I wanted ginger ale. To my astonishment he filled the order. It looked the same as the other drinks and Lil never knew.

The older man of our party told a story about a traveling salesman and a stewardess on a steamboat. I only understood half of it, but that half was vile.

Lil laughed. She said she first heard the story on a farm in Oklahoma. I knew she had never been in Oklahoma. Then the other man told a story, but it was not so bad. I have noticed during my investigations that the old man who frequents low places is generally too low to fall much farther.

Both men left about 11 o'clock, after we had refused an invitation to a late supper. Lil said we ought to have accepted, but it would have been an "all night job" and she had to have some sleep.

A little while after that Lil stepped to another table where a man and a girl were sitting whom she knew. The place was crowded with parties of drunken men and women by this time and the calliope piano kept up an incessant banging and clanging of ragtime. Occasionally the fellow with the cowlick front hair or another man, a dwarf, would sing disgusting songs.

As soon as I was left alone for a moment, a rather good looking young fellow came over and sat down beside me.

"How is traffic?" he inquired.

"Not very good," I answered—I didn't know what to say.

"New in town?" he pursued.

"Yes," I stammered, "I'm from the West."

"Things slow out there?" he asked sympathetically.

"Not much doing," I rejoined.

"Well, let's have a drink," chirped my casual friend. I glanced anxiously toward where Lil was sitting. She was oblivious. A drink had been served her at the other table. But the waiter again brought me ginger ale and I was thankful.

"Chi's all right," volunteered my companion, "but the game's been crabbed by a lot of old crowbaits that want to run the earth from the Y.M.C.A. A girl can do well enough here, though, if she plays in with the stir. I'm round here right along and I can put you wise to the live ones. Say, what's your name?"

I gave him a false name and a number in Clark Street. These seemed to satisfy him of my depravity.

"Tell you what I'll do," pursued the solicitous stranger, "I'll give you a knockdown to a friend of mine that's getting the money in fruit baskets. She's got an eight room flat a couple of blocks away. It's very exclusive—only the highest class trade. With your get up you'll cop the kale, believe me. Say, I like you, Kid. What d'you say?"

"Give me the number and I'll run in some time to-morrow," I promised.

The young man gave me a card with a name and street number. Just then Lil came back and the fellow excused himself, favoring me with a parting wink which I took to enjoin secrecy.

"Bah!" she snapped. "Don't play his game—play your own. Say, d'ye know who that guy is? That's 'Simp' Simon, but, believe me, he ain't no simp. He's a wise crook and he'll put you on the skids, Kid, if you give him a chance. I hadn't orta left

you alone, but I ain't seen Ide since she was married; and say, what d'you think? She's goin' to have a baby."

I glanced at Ide. She was drinking heavily. Already she was visibly intoxicated.

"Is that man her husband?" I ventured.

"Naw!" laughed Lil, "that's just a guy. Her husband's a traveling man."

It was nearly two o'clock and I was dead tired, as well as sick of the sights and the sounds. I begged Lil to go to a car with me. The cars passed the door.

Five minutes later I was on my way home. Lil went back to the café. She said she guessed she would stay with Ide that night over at Ide's flat.

Oh, how good home looked that night! I kissed the spotless pillows of my little white bed before my weary head touched them.

Next morning at breakfast my mother

handed me a newspaper. On the front page was an account of a pretty girl's suicide in a south side rooming house. The description haunted me until I visited a Wabash avenue morgue where her body lay.

The dead girl was Maizie—poor lost sister Maizie of the café. I cried a good deal that day.

The gray-haired man with the half-shut eyes no doubt has found another tenant for the red kimono Lil spoke of.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAIL OF WATCHFUL JOHNNY

MARTHA COLE was just a little girl of fifteen, working in a mail order house when I met her. I was working in the same mail order house looking for experience.

Martha came from a little country town and her mother was very poor. The father had been a railroad man—had died in an accident. There were two other children and Martha had to contribute as far as possible to the support of the family.

The little girl was paid six dollars a week. While plainly clad, she was neat, and with her dark brown hair, big, lustrous eyes and slight, childish figure, she was undeniably attractive.

Martha's mother fell ill something over a year ago and the child was appealed to for funds. She was then employed as a cashier.

There was no way in the world for Martha to help her mother except by borrowing money. She tried to do this and failed. Then she took fifteen dollars from the cash of the firm and sent it to her poverty-stricken home. For nine weeks she replaced a small amount each week out of her pay, intending ultimately to discharge the whole debt. Then the cash was audited and she was discovered.

In a flood of tears she told her story. Twenty minutes later she was in the street without a friend, without a character, a sick mother on her hands and no prospect of honest employment. One of the girls she had met in the place introduced her to "Watchful Johnny of the System." Johnny knew a way out of such difficulties. He lent money

to Martha to send to her mother. From that minute he owned her.

A week later one of the women of the Rescue Mission found Martha in red slippers and a red kimono in the very heart of the "district." She was delirious with drugs and had almost forgotten her own name. She was taken to the Midnight Mission and put to bed. The woman who had harbored her was taken to task for her share in the transaction, but she pleaded ignorance of the girl's story.

From the Midnight Mission Martha was taken to a Home for Girls. This is a "home" in the real sense. It takes a girl in, gives her aid and comfort and questions her afterward. Little Martha, who is at heart a good, honest girl, now has excellent employment, and the fortunes of the Cole family are at flood tide.

In connection with this case I came very

close to landing the particular "Watchful Johnny" who put Martha in the "bad lands," but these "Johnnies" be slippery fish, the System's protected workers. They command the best of legal talent and generally manage to wriggle through holes in the net. This fellow found one, and got away without punishment. I hope to get him yet. We are making nets with smaller meshes.

Then there was little Lizzie McLean. This child was sent to Chicago from Scotland to be taken care of by an aunt whom the parents had not known intimately for eighteen years.

Much may happen in eighteen years. The aunt has been for nearly ten years engaged in questionable rooming houses. She is by no means a delectable character. In fact, she has a police record.

Of course Lizzie McLean's parents in bonnie Scotland did not know that. So when

the generous and wealthy Chicago aunt of the little Highland lassie offered to pay her way to Chicago and find her remunerative employment—perhaps marry her to a rich man—the old-country folk were very glad to let their pretty daughter have her chance.

Now what happened to Lizzie when she reached Chicago was this: She entered the place run by her aunt and for a time was permitted to absorb ideas of "American life" in that atmosphere. Her aunt assured her that the patrons of the place, who made so merry and appeared to have so much fun, were "leading society men and women."

At last one of the "leading society men" became enamored of Lizzie, who was just entering her seventeenth year. He took her about a great deal, and Lizzie's aunt furnished her with fashionable clothes so that she might cut a dash in the quasi-fashionable world.

One night a girl jumped out of a second

story window of a cheap hotel and was picked up unconscious. The hospital authorities said she might die. An investigation revealed that the girl had been taken to the hotel by a man, but the man's identity was lost. He had disappeared.

Subsequently Lizzie told me what had happened. The "leading society man" had taken her to the hotel on the pretext that he was to meet her aunt there, and they were all to dine together. The man lied. What followed caused Lizzie to jump out of the window.

Lizzie's aunt is now a fugitive from justice and Lizzie is employed in a satisfactory way. She is under the protection of women who will see that she does not again fall into the hands of our familiar friend "Watchful Johnny" who ofttimes masquerades as a "leading society man."

Now harken to the story of Sarah Roe. Fourteen years old, Sarah was, when she

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walked into the Polk Street station with the vague idea that she could find relatives in Lake View. Probably the old mother of Sarah, who sent her West because she was unable to support her, supposed Lake View was a place where it was easy to find out from the neighbors where anybody lived.

When I became acquainted with Sarah it was in a saloon rear room. She was with two other women, and her innocent young face attracted my attention. I sat down at the table where Sarah was. She was very green. The other women told me she had knocked at their door a few nights before and asked for shelter. The companions of the girl belong to that class of "married" women that frequent back rooms of saloons.

Fifteen minutes' talk with Sarah convinced me that she was with dangerous company. She had been told by the women with whom I found her that the easiest way for her would

be to "pick up a friend." I took Sarah with me against the protests of these harridans who said that they had done "everything for her." Sarah is now a cashier in a downtown restaurant, employed by a kind-hearted man, who pays her well and tells me that she is thoroughly competent. Also she is under the protection of an organization that will protect her in the future. It was only good fortune that Sarah escaped the hawk eyes and talons of "Watchful Johnny of the System."

This sounds like repetition, doesn't it? Well, the troubles of the girl adrift are singularly alike. They have a familiar ring when one hears them from trembling lips twenty or thirty times a week. The reason I am telling of these girls one after another in this way is that I want to hammer home the truth about the problem that confronts us.

So I'm going right on with my story.

Four girls came to Chicago from a little

town one evening and went direct to a house in Armour Avenue, the address of which had been given them by a man who had visited their town the night before. He became too friendly with one of the girls, Carrol Brown, aged eighteen. Carrol was so fascinated with the tales this man told her of gayety at the Armour Avenue place that she persuaded three other young girls to join her in an expedition. It was a runaway. You see, this man did not violate the Mann Act. He merely told stories of Chicago fairyland likely to appeal to the fancy of a country-town girl.

The woman in charge of this place took the girls in, but after talking to them she became convinced that they were novices.

Now, one novice might be handled without too much trouble, but four novices spell "danger" in large capital letters. The woman became alarmed, and, being wise in her gen-

eration, she notified the Rescue Home people. Two of the women from the mission arrived and took these girls away. The woman who called up made much of her determination "never to be instrumental in the fall of an innocent girl."

What she feared was the consequences. One of the girls—the Brown girl—is naturally bad. She has been put in five different employments since her release from the Armour Avenue place. She is subnormal, and it may be difficult to save her. The real place for her is a hospital, because her ailment is largely mental. The others were very glad to be taken care of. One of them is the wife of a respectable mechanic, two are employees of a downtown firm that finds them competent, and the other is the protégée as ladies' maid of one of the best known women in the city. She is a gifted child, with no real vice about her. Once again "Watchful Johnny" was foiled.

One afternoon I was walking in Clark Street when I met a girl who did not seem to be more than fourteen. She was pretty, her pert little nose was held high, and the cheap clothes clung to her with a certain chic that distinguished her.

I stopped to speak. She was uppish at first and then interested. I asked her where she was working, and she told me she had been discharged from a department store because of inexperience. She had met a "fellow" who was going to marry her. She became confidential and told me that she was really living with the man over in North Dearborn Street, but it was only to be for a couple of weeks; the reason was that if his folks knew he was married in advance of certain legal procedure he would lose several thousand dollars.

The story sounded rather familiar. I wanted to see the man. She was delighted at

having found a friend who was not shocked at her story, and agreed to take me with her to meet "Tom," who was to be in the rear room of a Clark Street saloon at 2 P. M. When I entered that room with the girl her putative future husband nearly tore off the spring doors getting through them to the street.

The man was "Watchful Johnny" in one of his disguises.

Katie lived in a little town down state where she was one of the belles. I corresponded with her mother, who turned out to be a perfectly incompetent sort of person. There are too many such incompetent parents.

The Home for Girls took care of Katie. Nobody knew what happened except myself and the superintendent of the Home. Katie was there four weeks, and she proved herself a bright little housekeeper. Now she is taking care of the summer home of excellent people at Lake Carver. They know all about

her, but she doesn't know it, and they are too clever to let her suspect that they do. The girl is giving satisfaction, and the woman who took her is going to give her an expensive course of instruction in domestic science. She says Katie is worth it.

So, you see, all girls adrift are not entirely lost. Some of them are saved. I wish the proportion were greater. I am going to tell in the concluding chapters of this story how more girls may be saved. Still no word as to Mary Holden's whereabouts. Lil has promised to aid me in the search.

CHAPTER X

THE BEXELWAUM BALL

LIL wanted me to go to the Bexelwaum ball. It was more or less a special occasion, she told me, and a good many of the girls I had met downtown in my capacity as a working clerk were to be there.

My friend would not let me costume myself. She insisted on "fixing" me for the dance. When she had "fixed" me I looked so awful that I might easily have been arrested on suspicion. Hair of a half dozen shades was piled on my head; I was decked out with cheap jewelry and ribbons until I looked like a Christmas tree.

The hour was ten when we arrived at the hall. We bought tickets and made our way to the floor. It is really a beautiful ball-

room, splendidly lighted and decorated. It is no wonder that girls go there who have no means of knowing just how bad the place really is.

The orchestra played some seductive syncopated thing and the couples already on the floor were dancing it to all sorts of steps. A man they told me was Tango Tim was doing a grotesque and suggestive dance all by himself in the center of the floor. I was told that he received pay as a professional entertainer. He ought to get seven years without the option of a fine.

This was a "costume" dance. Some of the girls had their gowns far above their knees and cut so low at the top that very little was left to the imagination. I think most of these girls were between sixteen and eighteen years, though there was the class of old habitués, perhaps anywhere from twenty-five to thirty years old.

The crowd kept increasing until the café with its innumerable tables for drinks and the main floor were both packed. The characters included cowboys, soldiers, sailors, comedy Irish, French, Italian and Russian. There were soubrettes, ballet dancers, waitresses, nursemaids, Salvation army sisters, "baby dolls," and circus riders. Nearly all the girls had apparently striven for the most startling display of shoulders, arms and legs. There never was a musical comedy staged that could have equaled this display of briefly adorned femininity.

And there was no denying the fascination of this place. It is a blaze of light. Much to gratify the senses is offered at Bexelwaum's.

Professor Tango Tim alternated with a soubrette young person of extraordinary grace and sinuousness, who did the "Siamese Slip" all by herself and so popularized the movement that scores of girls all over the floor were

trying it within a few minutes. The Siamese thing calls for all sorts of back-bending, twistings and contortions of the upper body.

The girls with the very ill-fitting and very low-necked gowns could not even attempt these movements without over-emphasizing the lowness of their gowns or revealing the shortness of them.

The young woman dancing professionally had some sort of fluffy lingerie that protected her in the daring kicks and twists she executed, but the amateurs had the advantage of no such equipment. I never witnessed so amazing an exhibition as developed out of the general desire to Siamese.

Very soon the proximity of the café tables and the liberal supplies of intoxicants produced their inevitable result.

One of the first to become palpably intoxicated was a young woman dressed as an Indian squaw with a real baby strapped to her

back. The girl's face was stained a dull red and the poor baby was dyed a like color. The little thing was asleep when my attention was attracted by the loud talk of the "squaw" mother. A girl who told me she was the "squaw's" sister berated the latter for pinching the infant to wake it up so that it would cry and attract attention to her makeup.

Afterward I saw her punch the child myself, and the child cried. I spoke to her, and she laughed as she admitted that she wanted the child to cry. She thought if the baby cried she would get first prize for originality in her characterization. She was carrying the baby on her back, Indian fashion. Its poor little weazened face lolled over her shoulder and its eyes closed in utter exhaustion, despite her brutality.

I had no lack of partners. Lil saw to that, and, anyway, there were no formalities. Young men asked me to dance and I did.

The couples who were drinking—and I think most all of them were—became more and more daring as the time passed. The most simple dance can be made suggestive by drunken men and women.

I must have danced with six or seven partners in the first two hours of the affair. Every single one of them asked me, as though it were part of the evening's entertainment, whether they could "come up to the flat." The astonishing part of it was that hardly one of them was out of his teens. The way these boys talked to me was enlightening.

For instance: I danced with a lad not over twenty. We had done a few turns around the hall in a two-step. I could not do the things he did with the dance. He had all sorts of variations of the step.

"You want to come in with the flop," he told me.

"What's the flop?" I inquired.

"Well," he enlightened me, "when I lean back this way you want to tumble forward this way."

He illustrated how the thing ought to be done from his point of view. I blushed. It was an atrocious suggestion. I pretended that I couldn't understand him and refused to do what he wanted.

"Why," he said, "all these old time dances are on the blink. Nobody dances 'em, and nobody wants 'em. You've got to get some action into a dance nowadays or you can't put it across."

"What do you think the dance really ought to be?" I asked him. He was a very young fellow and it appeared to me he might be decent if he had the chance.

"Well," he answered, reflectively, "I figure that dancing and hunting with a gun are just

about the same. If the guys that come here to this place had any show, they'd rather go rabbit hunting, maybe."

"Well, is this a hunt instead of dance?" I begged.

"Sure it is," he responded, readily enough, and laughing at my ignorance. "All this stuff is phony. The guys don't give a care about dancing. They know that the girls like to dance, and they know the girls will be here in flocks. So if a fellow wants to cop off a girl, here's where he comes."

"But don't girls come here who can't be 'copped off,' as you call it?" I suggested.

"Oh, once in a while there's a kid that's straight and just happens to float in," he answered, "but, you see, they all get wise to it pretty soon. They don't want any girl to come to these doin's unless she's playing the game all the way down the line. Most of 'em are gold diggers, at that."

"What's a gold digger?" I queried.

"Say," answered my young friend, "maybe you come from the hills around Gary, but I don't know any of that bunch that talks the way you do. A gold digger is a miner."

"Yes," I agreed, "but how does being a 'miner' and a 'gold digger' apply to that little girl over there, for instance?"

"That kid with the red hat?" he inquired, pointing. "Why, she's the queen. That's Chrissy Tate. Why, Kid, she's got cards and spades on 'em all. She can get money from a 'Gypshun' mummy, believe me."

"But she looks like just a little girl," I told him. The boy had such nice eyes I thought there might be an undercurrent of decency about him.

"Kid," he said, with his worldly-wise look, "Chrissy's been travelin' this route for four years, and she knows more about what's going on along the trail than any of them. First she

used to be 'Steve's' girl, and she beat him up with one of his own bottles. He got scared of her, and since that she's traveled under eight different names. There's a funny thing about that Chrissy. Do you know what she does? When anybody is on to her she gets out a lot of old dolls she's got in a trunk and plays with 'em. Steve told me he came home one night and found her sittin' in the middle of the parlor floor playin' with a regular layout of dolls.

" 'You're sure crazy,' says Steve, 'put them things in the ash can.' "

"And he says Chrissy gathered all them fool dolls up in a bunch in her arms and sat up and cried all night. Now what the hell do you think of that?"

CHAPTER XI

HER RETROSPECTION

THE head floor-manager, distinguished by a dignified manner, a pair of narrow dark eyes that suggested villainy, a new fifteen dollar suit and a checked tie, signaled for the next dance, and my young, too sophisticated partner darted away. The orchestra, hidden behind a table piled high with empty beer bottles, struck up a noisy tune with much emphasis on the brass instruments. The dance was on in full swing.

For all the intent hilarity of the crowd, to me the scene was intensely pathetic. A large percentage of the crowd were tipsy. The scene was perfectly disreputable. There was nobody there who tried to make it respectable,

and had there been, that person probably would not have dared.

A much intoxicated man walked over to a girl standing near me.

"Do you Tango?" he asked.

Boldly he offered her his arm, and the two shuffled off. Like many of the others they were too weary to dance much, and before long I noticed they stopped their gyrations and sat down at a table to partake of the amber fluid.

The majority of the dancers were fast becoming awkward, and some lost step altogether. Couples bumped one another, leaving trails of human hate in their wake.

A woman with a hard, painted face came over to me and asked me where I was staying. I told her I had a good deal of trouble finding a "right" place to stay.

"Why, say," she said, "you ought to be get-

ting the kale while you're young. Don't let none of those flim-flammin' youths get hold of you. Cut out the love stuff, see? Get a guy that's got one foot in Graceland and one in ——. There's millions of them in Chicago, and they're your meat."

"Yes," I volunteered.

"If a girl can't get what she wants one way, she's got to get it another."

"What really does a girl want?" I suggested.

If I live to be a hundred years old I shall never forget the strange look that came into that creature's face.

"What does a girl want?" she croaked. "Why, what she wants is what she can't get."

"What do you mean by that?" I inquired.

"Why," she retorted, "men want women just to amuse them. I was married once—not long ago, either—only five years."

I looked at the hard, painted face. It was cruel, but she must have understood, for she laughed in my face.

"Say," she went on, "I've got a baby somewhere. He made me let one of them homes adopt it. Now I can't find out where the child is. God! Do you suppose I care anything about floating around with this bunch? We had over a thousand dollars, and then he went to work for a brewery. Then the brewery put him to work collecting in the 'district.' After he got in there he used to come home 'pickled' every night. Then he got to staying out. That time I was expecting the baby. I had to have attention in a hospital, and they told me I couldn't look after a baby for a long time, and I'd have to get somebody to care for it. You know, a woman doesn't know much about her baby before she gets it. Afterward is when she wants it.

"So I let them persuade me that my baby

would be too much for me, and they sent it to a 'home.' My little kid—God! I hain't ever set eyes on her. They took her away before I ever knew she was on earth.

"So, here's me, see? I'm not much good now. I'm pretty bad. I make men pay me now, see? I hate men and I hate women. I hate all the crazy kids that storm around this place. I'm married all right, but what's the use of a man like that? Why, he's worse than no man at all."

It was this woman who introduced me to Chrissy, the pretty girl with the child face. I talked to her for a long time. We danced in the same set later in the evening. Since that Chrissy and I have been very friendly. She lets me go to see her. She has promised that she would try to break away from the halls and get a new start. I don't know whether she will keep her promise, but I hope so.

Lil had been so busy with the men that she

almost forgot me. Just as I was leaving she asked if I had had a good time.

"I was interested," I replied.

"Going home alone?" she demanded.

"I guess that is the best way to go—from here," I smiled.

"Aw, Kid, don't hurry," she urged. "The fun is just beginning."

I told her I was tired and must get some sleep.

"Please be careful, and I hope you find the missing Kid," she said, as I left the hall.

When I returned home I asked my mother if she had received any word from Mary, pretty Mary Holden. I could see by the expression on her face that she believed my task a hopeless one. At any rate I told her I was learning a great deal about the big city and its traps for girls adrift.

CHAPTER XII

QUEER FISH IN THE DEPTHS

HUMAN nature becomes the more puzzling as its deeper soundings are explored. Down in the depths there are some very queer fish—fish with only a few of the sensibilities of surface species; invertebrates in the majority, purblind drifters with the shifting tides.

Over on the north side is a policeman who has made a great deal of money out of his connection with the vice traffic. He got only the droppings from overloaded bags that went to the men higher up, but even these were sufficient to buy a house and some very respectable interest-bearing securities. Chicago's girls adrift paid for the house and the securities, of course, but what I am trying to point out is

the contradictoriness of the grafter's character.

For this policeman is a regular attendant at church; he has a family of well kept children; his wife swears by him; his superiors insist that he is a valuable officer.

Now, here is another contradiction: One night last winter—a very cold night, too—I witnessed a transaction at the corner of Congress Street and Wabash Avenue that made me ponder. A poor shivering little girl stepped from a doorway and accosted a man who had just emerged from a taxi-cab. The man I had seen before. The girl I did not know. She seemed to be about seventeen.

I saw the man's hand go into his pocket, and then it was extended toward the suppliant, as he passed quickly into a nearby building. The girl stood staring at a $5 bill the man had given her.

It was then that I approached the girl and

asked her if I could help her. I carried some cards in my pocket book which called for the admission of friendless children such as this one seemed to be to a shelter that feeds them without demanding histories of their lives in advance. Sometimes they use the cards, but not often. This girl laughed shrilly as I spoke to her and showed me the $5 bill.

"What do you know about that?" she declared; "an' I never saw him before in my life."

The man I had recognized in the act of doing an apparently generous act was "Ike, the Kike," notorious around the world as a trafficker in women. I told the girl who her casual benefactor was, and she cursed me expertly for my interference.

"Suppose he is just what you say," she said. "D'you think I could walk up to one of your God-A'mighty crowd if I was broke like I am to-night and touch 'em for a five? Not

on your family Bible, Kid. I'd get a ticket for soup, more likely. That guy? Why, say, he's got a heart in him."

Now, I don't know what induced "Ike, the Kike" to give away part of his slimy earnings—whether it was a spasm of pity, a belated twinge of an atrophied conscience, a touch of swagger—perhaps the recklessness of inebriety, but when I saw the girl entering a corner café, intent, as she said, on "big eats," I fell once more into reflection upon the strange contradictions one encounters in an underworld character.

Take another case, that of a young woman I know who went as straight as an arrow from a Chicago high school to a place of evil fame known from Paris to Vladivostok. This girl told me her views in a dispassionate way. She was gentle with me and behaved throughout as though I were a silly, argumentative child in need of correction.

Of course, I was trying to get the girl out of the place; my visit was on behalf of an organization devoted to such rescue work.

"Why do you sociologists bother with people like me?" she demanded. "Why don't you begin your work in the public schools—yes, and in the private schools too—and build for the future by teaching boys and girls to be decent human beings at ages when they can be taught, when they are not already depraved?"

A sudden sharp twinge ran through my being. What if I should find Mary Holden and hear her speak like my high school friend? The horror of it caused me to shudder.

I admitted that we ought to do more sympathetic work in the schools and churches and homes, but emphasized my immediate case, which was her own. I wanted her to leave with me.

"No, I'm not going to leave here," the girl declared stubbornly. "I can tell myself the

truth about myself here—which is something. I never allowed myself to consider the truth about my own character until I was frankly and avowedly lost. Then I took an inventory and found I wasn't a bit worse than I had been for years."

"You aren't alone in the world, you know," I urged. "It isn't too late for you to try again."

"That sounds all right, but it isn't true," was the response. "I tell you it is no use trying to rescue girls who have joined the army —most of them don't want to be rescued. They dread the horrors of the climb back and had rather die than try.

"I was a bad girl, as you call it, when I was fourteen, and they said I was the brightest girl in my grade. I believe I was, too. Study came easily for me, but so did wickedness. I was as wicked as I was clever.

"My father was a traveling lecturer, and

my mother traveled with him. I lived with my aunt, who was prominent in four or five women's clubs. The school I attended was as bad, morally speaking, as this place is, and worse.

"I'll tell you another thing. For one girl who gets found out and has to hustle out of the way of the hypocrites who don't get found out, there are twenty just as bad as she is who marry and graduate into the ranks of the 'respectable.'

"There is eternal shouting and exhorting against the immorality and vice of the levee, but I wonder if it isn't society's hue and cry to divert attention from viciousness in what you call 'the best circles,' a condition that is a hundred times more important."

By this time the room in which we were conversing held an interested audience of painted, bright-eyed women. They applauded the girl who was speaking.

"Why are you forever twisting the tail of the dog?" she asked. "It is the other end that bites."

Everybody laughed.

"That is false philosophy," I declared. "You are eighteen, with the world before you if you will only give yourself a chance."

"Wrong again," she laughed. "Most of it is behind me. When a girl knows what I know she is a fool to lie to herself. I'm looking the facts in the face. If I've got to go to hell I'm going with my eyes open."

That girl is still a denizen in the depths, and the worst of it is she doesn't want to get out. The surface sunlight hurts her myopic blue eyes. There is hardly a more dangerous character, potentially speaking, in the levee district.

But what about the family and school neglect that have developed such a character? Is it not true, as this girl says, that the remedy

for such evil as this is to be applied in the school room?

Doesn't the situation call for general teaching of sex hygiene as one of the most important elements in the education of the child?

Is it not true that without determined concentration on the moral improvement of the rising generation through coöperation of schools and churches we are wrestling ineffectively with vice—trying to make the tail wag the dog?

Sometimes when I consider the task I have set myself in telling the conditions I have encountered in my investigations in and around Chicago my heart almost fails me and my spirit revolts. Will it do any good? I ask myself.

Will the men and women who are fathers and mothers be helped to realize that the child must be trained to moral standards in the home?

Will the churches in some measure be convinced that they must organize for a combined effort to save children of to-day—that souls are more important than sectarianism, and that Sunday is not the only day in the week?

This story is not a romance—it is a tragedy of truth.

To resume: Let us see how far the law is effective in preventing operations of the System's recruiting agents in this search for girls to carry on the traffic that is constantly in progress.

Some time ago I determined to pose as a vice agent myself, and a very brief experience was sufficient to convince me of the ease with which the ranks are kept filled up.

I began by visiting an employment agency engaged in furnishing female help. The woman in charge was suspicious and reserved at first. I told her I wanted "half a dozen

girls for out of town," and that they had to be good looking. She grinned at me and asked what sort of work I wanted them for.

"Oh, kind of general," I said.

"About how old girls?" she inquired.

"Well, young enough to be lively," I replied, laughing.

"Now just what is the employment?" she insisted. "You may confide in me, you know."

"The fact is," I whispered, "I want them for entertainers—it's a high class house in a small city, about a hundred miles from here."

"It is against the law for us to furnish girls that way," the woman objected. "The penalties are severe and we have to be careful."

"I don't see how you'd be running much risk," I put in, "but of course I don't want any kickers."

"I think I can get what you want," said the wily agent, finally. "When do you want them?"

The woman named her price, which was heavy. It was arranged that I should call next morning at ten. I never went back.

Now, just consider that experience. I know nothing of the ways of professionals in securing girls for the white slave trade, but despite my utter ignorance I was able in a comparatively brief time to close a contract for six girls to be sold into the bondage of shame.

Nor is it any sufficient answer that they were to be women already employed in the traffic. On the contrary, this woman told me the girls would be signed up for hotel work.

"That's what we send them out as," she said, "and what they do when they get there is none of our business."

Nor was this my last experience in posing as an agent of the vice trust. What happened when I opened negotiations with another agency I'll tell later on.

CHAPTER XIII

TREFALKA AND STEVE

I MUST tell the story of Trefalka Gralak, who is dead now. When I first knew her, two years ago, she was a dear, soft-hearted little thing with a pretty face and figure. She loved a man named Steve Bleczak.

They had been sweethearts, these two, ever since the old days in the school, and they were graduated together from the school house into the factory.

When big, muscular Steve used to show up in the work room Trefalka's blue eyes shone and her cheeks flushed. Then she used to shake the heavy dark curls down round her face to hide her confusion. Oh, yes, Trefalka was very much in love with Steve.

One night after her work was over Trefalka ran into my house.

"What do you think I got?" she gasped out.

"Tell me," I smiled.

"Look!" laughed Trefalka.

The child extended her hand for my inspection, and upon it was a ring set with the tiniest diamond I ever saw. Trefalka's eyes were sparkling and she breathed rapidly in her excitement.

"Ain't it class?" babbled the child. "Oh, ain't it a Jim Dandy—no, ain't it a Joe Hun?" she went on. "Dear, me an' Steve's going to be married. His pa's goin' to give us a lot, an' he's goin' to get the buildin' loan to lend us the money so that we can build a house. It is all planned."

I never saw any girl so happy as Trefalka. She cried one minute and laughed the next, and she made me promise that I would be there when she was married, because I had

always been her best friend. How I wish I could have sustained my title to that office!

"Trefalka, dear," I interposed, "what about your wedding dress? It will be something white, of course, and you will carry flowers and have a dance afterward?"

The girl's face fell.

"Pa's drunk again," she whispered. "There ain't a cent in the bank. My money from the factory goes for food. Pa always makes me give him all my money."

"You must tell him you are to be married," I urged, "and perhaps he will let you save for some wedding things."

"No," she said, sadly, "I have to give it to him, or we all get beat up. Anyway, all the girls does it that stays home. I don't care about giving them the money if I could just get the wedding too. The dress, you know, will take $15, and the other things $10. I think I could get everything for $30—the

things to eat and drink, and everything like that."

I made up my mind that Trefalka should have what she wanted to be married in, poor child, but the date slipped my memory, and I shall never cease to regret it.

. . . . . .

"Steve quit his job in the factory," said Trefalka. "He says it wasn't very genteel. Steve is awful proud."

"What is he doing now?" I asked.

"In one of them skating rinks places at South Chicago," she answered. "Say, the girls are swell—big willow plumes and such skirts and waists—all silk. He likes that, Steve does. And I haven't got nothing. I shame myself with Steve."

Then the storm broke. Trefalka buried her curly head in my lap and cried her heart out. The little body shook with great heavy sobs. It was long before I could calm her.

"Don't you worry about Steve," I said. "If he can be won away from you by a sleazy silk skirt, you don't want him anyhow."

"But I do," she raged. "By G—, you women in America ain't got no hearts for men," she stormed. "I want Steve!"

And who could blame the child for wanting to look her best before the man she loved? Wasn't it human—wasn't it the best of the woman in her?

Poor Trefalka! Her crying ceased. She wiped her eyes, grasped my hand tightly and went away to her home. Poor little girl—such a home!

You can't wonder at anything that happens when a girl with a hungry heart must betake herself to filthy quarters filled with crying babies, a drunken father and a quarrelsome mother. Rather a hard place to turn to in an extremity!

Two weeks later there was a knock at the

door. I threw it open, and there, under the flickering porch light, stood Trefalka.

"Trefalka," I cried. "Oh, Trefalka."

The little body, swathed in a cheap satin gown, swayed forward. I put my arm around the girl and led her in. She was painted and her eyebrows were grotesquely penciled.

"I guess you know," she began just about a whisper.

"Why did you?" I interposed.

"Well," she shivered, "it's down to what they call Joe Howard's joint. It was Kitty out to the factory who took me down. She keeps company with Dan, the bar fly."

"But you know better than to go there," I answered sternly. "You knew what sort of place it was."

"Well, I didn't know it was so crazy as that," the girl went on. "That barkeep is the hoarse guy that swiped Kitty's lockets—you know, him that was pinched for bringin' girls

from Indiana to a fake weddin'. I told Kitty about Steve and says I couldn't get married because I didn't have no weddin' dress, and Kitty says: 'Falka, why don't you come to Howard's with me, because you can make enough in a week to get the dress and things. You can work down there until 12 at night, and then get back to your shack.'

"So I asked her what I could make steady, and she says it could be $8 a night and $15 on Saturdays. She tells me it is grand—all lace curtains and a nickel pianner and all the things you want to drink. 'If you don't believe me,' says Kitty, 'come and see for yourself.'"

The girl paused. I asked her to tell me all.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCARLET WEDDING DRESS

"WELL," continued Trefalka, "that night I went home early from work and got supper for the kids. Pa was awful mean to me. I asked him if he could do something for my weddin' and he says 'to —— with weddin's. Take the vinegar jug and chase me some booze,' and that's all he says to me.

"Then Ma says to Pa not to get no more booze, and Pa says to her to shut up, because he's going to do the talking around the place, and Ma says something to him, so he tries to hit Ma with a chair, and Ma ducked and the chair hit the door and come back on Pa's head. Then Ma cried an' was on her knees on the floor.

"'Falka,' she says, 'your pa has gone and died on us.'

"I took a look at Pa and he was all bloody, but I didn't care, anyway. 'He won't die for a long time, anyhow,' I told Ma, and then I ran out and met Kitty. I was cryin' and Kitty says, 'what the h— is the use of bawling? Come on down to Joe's.'

"So that's how I come to go."

I took Trefalka in my room and washed the paint off her face. That process revealed a very pale and drawn-looking child. Kittie had tried to bleach her hair with peroxide, but I was glad that the solution had been too weak. Trefalka's hair was still unspoiled.

"I got the money for the dress," whispered the girl shivering, "but I'd rather work in the factory for $2 a week. That Howard joint is some fierce place. They got a cash register just like in a wine room, and what you go to do is to get the fellows tanked so they'll spend all the

money they got on 'em. They rings it all up on the register and the girls get a percentage on the checks. Some o' the girls thinks it's fun, but it ain't. I know Carrie that works in the factory. She works down there, too. Her husband lets her work at night, and he calls for her at 12. If she ain't got a good deal of money he beats her up, because he thinks she's givin' some of her money to a guy or something like that.

"Phil, that looks after rooms, he says to us girls in there: 'Get the rolls; don't forget it is pay night.'

"Say, when a guy's drunk and doped you dassen't leave a nickel in his pockets. If you do, they're down on you."

"Trefalka," I said. "How can you marry Steve now?"

"Steve knows," she snapped; "to —— with him. He wouldn't believe me why I did it. To-night he found me out."

There was an awful look in the child's face as she told me this. She seemed to have just found out how she had been cheated. I saw that her eyes were swollen and heavy with much weeping.

"I don't care," she went on, and then the next instant wailed: "Oh, my God! Miss, yes, I do care. I love Steve and I want him. But Steve knows now, and he's quit. I was sittin' in the back room there with four girls an' there was some fellows buying beer. Helen that used to work in the factory was there, an' I noticed her sniffin' flakes. Then two more fellows came in, and they looked in our room. I stood up with my hands and feet froze and shiverin' all over.

"'Steve!' I says. 'Wait, Steve. I'll tell you all about it.'

"'You,' Steve says, and then he laughed. 'You —— ——' Steve says to me, and I tried to get hold of him to make him talk to me, but

it wasn't no good. He hit me right here, an' I fell down."

Trefalka pushed down the shoulder of her near-silk waist and showed me a livid bruise on her white flesh.

"I come to quick, but when I did Steve was gone, and he won't never come back—he won't never come back," moaned the little girl. She was rocking backward and forward in an agony of distress.

"Trefalka," I said, "you must find Steve and let me talk to him. I believe I can make him take care of you. He did love you, didn't he?"

"Oh," moaned Trefalka, "I know he won't come back. I just begged him. 'Steve,' I said, 'Steve, for God's sake don't throw me down, Steve.' When he took his ring off'n me I just hung to him and told him I'd work all my life, if he'd just let me show him I was white and not to take the ring, but he wouldn't

have no truck with me—he just wouldn't have no truck with me.

"And I just did it to get a weddin' dress so I wouldn't shame him—he was so proud."

If any of the women I know who are stern judges of other people's morals could have sat with me and watched that helpless lost sister, her hands stretched out empty toward me, tears streaming down her face, I am sure they would have wept too.

"Trefalka, to-morrow we'll go and find Steve," I said. "I'll help you."

"Please," she assented. "I'll come to-morrow." And she was gone.

The door closed after her, but I looked out quickly. She was not going in the direction of her home. In an instant I had a cape thrown over my shoulders and was following her. I knew where she was going now. Steve was in South Chicago. She was going there. Trefalka sat in the front part of the

street car with her head bowed down. She did not see me. At last we reached the skating rink.

As I reached the corner I waited an instant. The skaters were pouring out of the door. The calliope that had been screeching out a discordant refrain was still. The last couple turned past the corner. I could see Steve's big frame outlined against the flapping shade as he reached to put out the lights one after another.

I stepped forward to plead with him that he forgive her the sin of which he himself was guilty—to tell him that Trefalka didn't understand, and that it was really for him. That instant Trefalka darted past me, breathless, her eyes glittering fiercely. She was past the door and by his side just as he reached for the last light.

"Steve," she cried, tensely—"Steve, dear—

are you goin' to do what you said? Are you goin' to throw me down?" she cried.

"Didn't I tell you to git out, you —— ——? Do you think any fellow wants to marry your kind?" His face hardened and an ugly scowl lay upon it.

"Steve, don't you see, it was the weddin' dress, the money? Them girls did it, Kitty and Helen—they say it's all right." She fell on her knees before him. Her arms embraced him.

"Let me alone," he said. "I'm done." He shoved her off roughly.

Trefalka sprang to her feet. There was a gleam in the air, a cry of pain. Steve's bulky frame sank to the floor.

Before I could cry out Trefalka had thrown herself full length upon his body. Her mouth found his. Then the knife was in her heart too.

I cried for help. An officer made his way through the gathering crowd. The lights flared up. There they lay, Steve and Trefalka—dying. His arm had found her waist and held her close.

CHAPTER XV

ANNIE'S HUSBAND

Now, dear reader, you are liable to exclaim with annoyance that this is not a story, but a series of stories. To this I wish to reply that this is a story—my own story of my own experiences in the by-ways of the underworld.

Here is the case of Annie Cracrow. I had been requested to find out at first hand what became of 3,500 fatherless babies born in Chicago every year. Annie Cracrow afforded at least one illustration.

I worked with Annie in a sweatshop, a tailoring plant on the west side. Side by side we sewed on seams and tapes, finishing garment after garment. It was a monotonous and soul-stifling employment—always the same

thing. There was no variety at all, no individuality possible in the work, no avenue for inspiration. It was so much the garment, so much to be done—day's beginning to day's end.

One night—a dull rainy night—we streamed out of the factory with a thousand or more girls working just as we were. Most of the workers were big, angular, foreign-born girls, who had been mal-adjusted to the confinement and dust of shops.

The continual bending over garments by day, the same work at home during most evenings, had begun to tell on many once strong constitutions. Some had deep hollows under their cheek-bones; others coughed continually and complained of pains in the chest and back.

Annie Cracrow's face was flushed as we left the workroom. She had the cough, too. I had taken her to a doctor, who said she ought to be sent to a dry climate. Poor girl—she

hadn't the money to go anywhere. Besides, there were other considerations.

We were headed for the Polish settlement after work. Annie had to stop in a doorway because she was overcome with a paroxysm of coughing. Two girls from the factory joined us and we walked on together.

"The band was out yesterday—did you hear it?" asked one of the girls.

"Sure I did," smiled Annie—"yer pa was in it, carrying the statue of Joseph. I seen him too."

"It was a pretty good parade," went on the other girl, "but my ma says they used to have better ones in the old country and the streets wasn't so dirty."

"How's your brother Stan, Annie?" inquired one of the girls. "Is he still doin' time down to the Bridewell prison?"

"Yes," nodded Annie, "but he's goin' to be home pretty soon, and Butch, too."

"She's that crazy about Butch," confided another girl to me in a whisper— "Why, say, she'd lie down and let him walk over her. Say, I wouldn't let no feller get me goin' that way."

Annie looked around at me and smiled.

"Do you love a feller?" she asked.

I did not reply, so she went on:

"Sometimes Butch was awful mean to me, but if I just could have him where I could work for him—I mean in some little house—I'd make him love me. You can't make no man love you right unless you can fix his breakfast," she philosophized. "Butch is great on breakfasts, and where he boards they ain't clean."

"Annie, when are you going to see your brother in the Bridewell?" I asked.

"To-morrow," she said. "I wish you would come."

"I'll go," I said, and was rewarded with the

story of Stanislaus Cracrow's arrest and conviction, together with a notorious rascal known to the police as "Butch" Krapadinski. There had been a revolver battle before the men were captured, and Stanislaus had been wounded. The men were about to complete their sentences.

So the next morning Annie and I went to visit them. Annie was dressed in her plain best. Her hair was plastered down straight on her forehead with fastidious fashion. She wore a straw hat with a big, red rose.

The poor child was beamingly happy. She was going to see "Butch." When the guard let us into the cellroom she was trembling. I have read learned disquisitions which essayed to prove that such human creatures as Annie Cracrow are unable to experience the finer emotions. Some sociological pundits ought to travel with me for a month or two.

The cell number was 123. I saw a man sit-

ting in the far corner of the dark little coop. He came forward and stood with his hands clutching the bars. The man was Stanislaus.

"Hello, Kid," he cried. "We ain't got no more shop work in here—we're coming out tomorrow, me and Butch."

The big, broad shouldered fellow smiled as he patted his sister's hand. His face lighted up and he seemed more human than when it was in repose.

"Butch comin' out too, Stan?" asked Annie. "Are you sure they'll let him out?"

"Sure, he's got his 'stop-work' card. Say, Annie, Butch is still stuck on you—he tipped it off to me on the dinner march two or three times."

Annie's face was glorified. For all her plainness she looked positively happy. She was nervously twisting a bit of ribbon on the front of her gown.

"I'm goin' down to see Butch," she said to me. "Want to come?"

So we made our way to cell 153. There stood "Butch." He was hideous—a thin, yellow-skinned misfit of society. The low, slanting brow, heavy jaw and shifting eyes with one drooping lid told me more in a glance than Annie could have told me in a month.

"So you're Annie's sweetheart?" I ventured.

"Sure," he leered, staring at me sullenly.

"Then you're a lucky fellow, and I hope you know that," I told him, stepping aside to let them converse privately. But I couldn't help overhearing.

"Butch, dear," she said, "you're coming home to-morrow. Will you come out to the place with Stan?"

"Sure," was the reply. "Sure, I'm comin' out there."

Annie was seized with a fit of coughing and I stepped forward to help her.

"Listens like the con," remarked the man behind the bars with utter indifference.

"It's just a bad cough," I declared. "What she needs is a rest and a better home."

Annie recovered and resumed the conversation. What she said gave me the first insight into her truly desperate plight.

"Butch," she gasped, "Butch, you must come. The priest says he'll make the call. You know it ain't goin' to be long, Butch."

"Aw, sure," was the response. "Sure, I'm comin', Kid. I said I would, didn't I?"

The remainder of the conversation carried on by poor Annie with the utmost frankness and with no evident anxiety on the part of the man, left nothing to be imagined as far as I was concerned. After we had once more visited the brother and were again out in the sunshine, I begged Annie to let me help her.

"Will he marry you?" I asked.

"If he don't Father will kill me," she replied.

"What about Butch—won't he be shot, too?"

"Why, no," she said, in surprise, "they always figure it's the girl, not the man. Pa wouldn't do nothin' to him."

"Do you love this man?" I persisted.

"Sure," answered Annie, surprisedly. "I'm goin' to be the mother of his child—that's why I want him to be sure and come home. I wouldn't tell nobody but you, only you've been so kind to me. I'm afraid if Butch don't come home soon everybody'll know."

The next day ended my experience in that particular sweat shop. I was engaged in another part of the State running down some clews with the hope of getting trace of little Mary Holden, and some time passed before my return. Annie had promised that if Butch did not keep his promise to her she would let me know.

CHAPTER XVI

MARY HOLDEN!

A FEW days after I returned to Chicago I heard a step on my porch soon after dusk. Someone rang the bell. When I answered, Annie's sister, Victoria, was standing there. She was breathless.

"Please be so kind to go see Annie," she pleaded. "Pa chased her out and he says he's goin' to kill her, only he ain't got no gun—the saloonkeeper's got it."

I found Annie at an address in Dearborn Street. She was the mother of a boy baby. The poor child-mother was in desperate straits. Her chest was shrunken and the flesh was drawn tightly over her bones. The girl's eyes were still bright. She smiled at me as I entered.

"Why did you not send for me?" I scolded. "You had my address all the time."

"I said I would," she began, "but Pa threw me out. He would have shot me, only he loaned the saloonkeeper the gun for drinks. My baby came down by the Salvation Home."

She pulled back the dirty coverlet on her little bed to let me see the baby's face. The child cried and she patted it tenderly with her thin hand.

"Where is Butch?" I demanded. "Didn't he marry you?"

"No," she confessed, her eyes filling with tears. "He didn't come back, but he will some time, 'cause the baby looks just like him and somebody's goin' to tell him."

"Doesn't he send you any money?" I persisted.

"Not yet."

"Well, he is going to take care of that baby and you too," I declared.

She was quick to defend her man.

"Maybe Butch ain't had no work," she said.

An hour later I visited the Court of Domestic Relations. A warrant was issued for Butch. He was found and brought before the court. He tried to lie out of Annie's charges.

"You marry her and take care of your child, or I'll send you to the penitentiary for a life term," I whispered.

He stared at me aghast. He rolled his eyes and his jaw dropped.

"Why?" he gasped.

"You know," I snapped. "You know, don't you?"

It was a random shot but it told. Butch knew why he ought to go to the penitentiary for life even if I did not. My threat had stirred a horrible fear in his shriveled soul. The rascal thought I had found out all about him. He was a quaking picture of terror.

"Marry her," I demanded, "now."

"Quick," he assented. "Get the priest."

So I went to poor little Annie's wedding and saw that she had a few bits of finery to wear. The man she married is a scoundrel of the coarser type, but fear is keeping him straight.

"Butch," I said after he was married, "if ever I see a bruise on Annie—if ever I find out that you are not good to her or the baby—if you don't get work and keep it and support your little family, do you know what I am going to do?

"Well," I said quietly, "it will be fifteen years at least—and perhaps—"

I made a suggestive motion with my hand toward my throat. The man shuddered. I don't know all he has done in the past, but I do know what he is doing now. He is taking care of Annie and the baby and he is working steadily.

One evening after I had left Annie I was walking up South State Street when I noticed a familiar figure just a few paces ahead of me. I stepped into a dark areaway and watched. The figure turned, almost facing me. It was Mary Holden.

I was just about to rush out and speak to her when I saw her nod to a passing man. The man took her arm and the couple disappeared into a tumble-down frame building. The door closed behind them, and I heard the lock click. I knocked frantically at the door, but received no response.

CHAPTER XVII

I HUNT A JOB ON THE STAGE

I RAN to the corner where I found a kind-faced policeman. I told him I was searching for a girl. He promised to help me. I pointed to the building where I had seen Mary enter, and together we walked back to the locked door. It took only a few minutes for the strong shoulders of the officer to break down the door. Together we ascended the stairs. In the rooms I heard a scurrying of feet. At the top of the staircase a florid-faced man approached us.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"We are looking for a girl, and we intend to search the place," retorted the policeman. "We know the girl is here. We just saw her come in."

"There must be some mistake," said the man. He shrugged his shoulders as the stalwart officer of the law led the way into one of the rooms. For fully an hour we searched, but no sign of Mary. Finally the officer turned to me.

"See that?" he asserted, as he pointed to a narrow passageway. "That leads to the alley, and through it your friend left this house."

I walked back to the corner with my kind aide. He promised to have the tumbledown shack watched and to help find pretty Mary Holden.

"That place is filled with theatrical people," said the policeman just as I bade him good night. "Maybe a theatrical bureau can give you some information that might be valuable. A lot of girls hang around them trying to get on the stage." Then he shook my hand and wished me success.

I don't think I shall ever forget my adven-

ture in the rôle of a stage-struck girl seeking an engagement.

It seemed for about two weeks, while the trail was fresh, that nearly every prominent manager in the country wanted to engage me as a leading woman—at least that was the impression I gathered from the anxiety of the agents I visited to secure my services.

When I started out on this angle of my investigation I wore a natty short-skirted blue serge suit, a pair of satin pumps and a jaunty turban. I let my hair hang down my back in a queue so as to enhance the impression of extreme youth, and in my hand I carried a silver chain reticule.

In the first theatrical bureau I visited I met a young man who was seated at a desk talking to a girl who had preceded me. When he saw me he hurried the business through and nodded with an ingratiating smile indicating that I might approach.

I told the man I was from Montauk, Illinois, and that I wished to go on the stage. He glanced me over from head to foot in an appraising sort of fashion, and then grinned.

"What line?" he inquired, tapping the desk with his pencil.

"Vaudeville or light opera," I replied. "I'd like a part if I can get it; I don't want to go into the chorus."

"Any experience?" asked the young man in dulcet tones.

"Some," I answered. "I can dance well, and I know music too."

"Well," he reflected, "I have several places open in outside vaudeville houses. Of course, a girl's got to be wise to get along in the business nowadays."

"You mean well educated?" I asked.

"Oh, wised up, you know—not too high-toned to get along with her friends," he said.

"Do you think I can make good?" I coaxed.

"That"—and he favored me with another X-ray inventory—"that depends on your ankles, etc., my dear."

I thought this young man was sufficiently friendly and so decided to go away, leaving my 'phone number, because he said he would call me up as soon as he found the job I wanted, which, he said, might be any minute.

As I left the office he called out to me that I must be ready for a tryout at any time of the day or night, because theatrical managers had to provide for emergencies, and people wanting good engagements had to be prepared to submit to trifling inconveniences.

Outside in the hallway I paused to get my breath. In all my life I had never encountered anyone so frankly analytical of my personal endowments and attractions as Mr. Blank had proved.

While I was standing there I heard the door open between Mr. Blank's room and the next

office, where a man that writes songs holds forth. The conversation was so loud that I couldn't help hearing it.

"A peach!" cried Mr. Blank. I knew his voice.

"Some class!" replied the other man. I never saw him.

Of course they meant me, but since I had purposely caparisoned myself like a gay lily to get that theatrical job, and was ashamed to go on the street because of my short skirt, the opinions of Blank and company did not turn my head. I crept quietly down the stairway instead of waiting for the elevator.

Somehow I had no taste for further exploration that day. I went home. Mother gave me a head massage and I had partially regained my poise by dinner time. We had guests for dinner and they stayed rather late. It was nearly twelve when they left. A few

minutes after the telephone rang. I answered the bell. Mr. Blank was talking.

"Hello!" he called. "Is this Miss Montigny?"

"Yes," I answered as softly as possible. "This is Cecile—who is speaking, please?"

"Say," trilled the other end, "this is Blank, d'you get me?"

"You're the theatrical gentleman," I whispered.

"Right-O, Kid," he laughed. "Say, I've hooked a swell job for you in stock. It's a road playing rep. I've got to come over and talk it with you."

"But I live away over on the north side," I cooed. "It's past midnight and I couldn't think of asking you to call at this time of night."

"Oh, that's all right," he rattled on, "it won't take me many minutes. What's the address?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MIDNIGHT CONVERSATION

THE nerve of Mr. Blank!

When he demanded to see me I told him politely that I lived in a boarding house, and that if I asked anyone to my room at this time of night someone would be sure to criticise me.

"What you want to do is to get a job before you get worried about the critics," he chuckled. "I've got the swellest job in the business waiting on the stocks for you, but we've got to close it to-night."

What he said about the critics nonplussed me for an instant. Mr. Blank was a logician.

"The best I can do is to come down in the morning and talk it over with you," I pleaded—"will not that do?"

"Oh, well, all right," he snapped, and I heard him hang up the receiver.

I was fixing my hair for the night when the telephone rang again. I answered it.

"Hello!" said a thick voice. "This is Blank."

"Why, Mr. Blank," I interrupted, indignantly, "do you know what time it is? It is nearly one o'clock."

"Time?" he gurgled. "What's time to do with us? Time was made for slaves."

"White slaves!" I let slip, inadvertently.

"What?" growled the man.

"Oh," I said, "I've got to go to bed."

"Wait a minute," urged Mr. Blank. "Say, Kid, get on your glad rags and come on out—make a sneak for it. I'm waiting down on the corner."

"Why—there is no place we can talk this time of night," I remonstrated. "Why can't you wait until morning?"

"I'll tell you when I see you," he insisted. "Come on down—make a quick change."

"Mr. Blank," I laughed.

"Yes, sweetheart," drooled Mr. Blank.

"Good night!"

"——" snarled the thick voice as I cut off the connection.

A few minutes later the 'phone began ringing again, so I pulled out the plugs of the receiver and put the useful little instrument out of use for that night. Also I slept the sleep of the just.

Now that is one side of the screen. Any girl with slight experience and some personal attractiveness is certain to be treated just as I was when she tries to get on the theatrical boards through her own personal unaided endeavor.

Let us see some of the other angles of this everlasting girl hunt as it is conducted in the

modern city of Chicago—the city wherein "vice has been abolished."

I decided to go about the employment agencies. You will recall that I told you of one little experience I had with them in a previous chapter.

Dressing myself in a flashy suit, topped off with a hat that resembled an ostrich farm, also wearing a wig to conceal my own dark hair, I believe I succeeded in losing whatever external evidences of respectability I ever possessed.

First I called up four or five employment agencies, and in each case something like this conversation followed:

"Hello! This is Miss Montigny."

Generally there was a man on the other end of the line.

"Yes—what can we do for you?"

"I am looking for some girls to work in a

hotel over a saloon. You know what I mean, dearie?"

I found the "dearie" invariably effective when talking to a man.

"Yes, I know, but it's against the law for us to furnish them, and we don't dare do business over the 'phone."

"Well, never mind," I admonished. "Look 'em up, and I'll come down."

With another agency on the line I had better luck. The man agreed to get the girls and have them ready for me to look over right away, but he would not make a deal as to price over the telephone.

"Say!" he shouted, as I was about to hang up, "do you want squabs or broads?"

"Oh, little ones," I giggled. "Don't want any old ladies, you know—I ain't running a home for the aged."

That callous bit of repartee seemed to make me very popular with the man on the 'phone.

He promised that he would send me a "bunch" of new ones.

I boarded a street car and was soon in the office of this accommodating personage. He was a short, thick-set man with shiny, strong teeth. His eyes were long and narrow. He may have been a foreigner, but he spoke good English. His hair was jet black and he wore diamonds on two fingers.

"I'm Miss Montigny," I told him.

"You called about some furniture?" he inquired.

"Yes," I said. "What luck have you had?"

"Well," he croaked, "we've got plenty of second hand stuff all the time, but when you want it right out of the factory, it's not so easy all the time. What kind of a place did you say it was?"

"Hotel and saloon," I smiled. "There'll be a bit in it for you."

"There are three or four squabs down near

where I stay now," he put in. "They're looking for a chance, I know. Of course, I can't go to 'em direct, but I'll find out about 'em before night. What do I get?"

I named a sum that I thought would attract him. It did. His eyes became narrower and longer than ever, and his lips moved as if he were eating candy. He was sensing the money.

Within four hours I was promised eight young girls to come to that visionary saloon and hotel of mine, avowedly for evil purposes. Out of the fifteen agencies I talked to only three appeared to have no system of providing for the emergency they thought I wanted filled.

And yet there is supposed to be a rigid supervision of such places. What sort of inspection do you suppose can be in effect when a system such as I describe is permitted to exist?

CHAPTER XIX

GRAY WOLF AND LOVE PIRATE

BEWARE of the Gray Wolf.

Gray Wolf is a wary creature that prowls at night, but is not above locating his prey in the daytime. It is the most dangerous denizen of the undergrowth that bewilders little girls adrift.

Gray Wolf often is a very respectable-looking prowler. He looks as though it might be safe to ask him the way home, but to repose much confidence in him often is a fatal error, for the Gray Wolf is a predatory animal, keen of scent, resourceful.

Sometimes you may have seen gray wolves with only a little gray above their ears—the rest of them sleek and shiny, black or brown. But do not be deceived! Always look for the

gray patches above the ears. It is a sign to betray and warn.

Also beware of the Love Pirate. She is a dangerous character. She often is brilliantly plumaged, furred and feathered. Again, she may be demurely but expensively garmented. She preys upon Gray Wolf and roams through the tangled undergrowths with him when Gray Wolf hasn't any more interesting quarry in sight.

Also Love Pirate is the worst enemy of the wife and home. "Dolled up," she haunts downtown in the very thick of things, where men live their lives.

The wife in the home is last seen by her departing spouse in a sort of wrapper or morning gown. When he compares her appearance as he last saw her with that of the radiant, smartly shirt-waisted girl who wears carefully dressed hair, it is likely to be to the wife's disadvantage.

Love Pirate knows her advantage and uses it. She is on the alert to attract men who can further her own purposes. She is unscrupulous. And she gets her training in evil from Gray Wolf.

Any large city is filled with gray wolves. Some of them are merely blasé habitués of the underworld—others are foolish family men in search of adventure.

There are not so many love pirates as gray wolves. That is why the gray wolves are always hunting. The favorite prey of Gray Wolf is the unsophisticated young girl who is just entering an industrial career and is having a hard time to make both ends meet. The cafés are favorite hunting grounds of Gray Wolf after nightfall, but in the daytime he is at home among the tall office buildings of the business district.

It was to find out the methods of Gray Wolf that I obtained a position as an office girl with

a downtown concern in the brokerage line. My duties were not heavy, but "tact" was required in handling the business. It was often necessary to lie deliberately over the telephone in order to conserve the interests of this concern.

The office girl who cannot or will not lie glibly when she is told to do so is not popular. Generally she accepts the situation, weakens her position by creating a sort of secret bond between herself and her employer, and thus finds herself exposed to other indignities.

In the office that employed me were two other girls. One, Mercedes, was an attractive blonde who wore handsome clothes. The other does not figure in this story. I happen to know that Mercedes had her clothes made by a modiste whose lowest price is $80 for a suit. Also, Mercedes lives in a flat out South that costs $70 a month and is elaborately furnished. Mercedes' salary is $15 a week. She

never earned that much by any office activities that I was able to observe.

Mercedes' hats are creations. They are the sweetly simple confections that cost out of all proportion for the materials in them.

Mercedes' shoes are the $12 a pair sort. Mercedes is popular with the head of the firm. He has gray patches over his ears and is himself an exquisite in matters sartorial.

After I had been in the place a week Mercedes whispered to me that the second partner of the firm, Mr. Hunter, had "fallen for my kid getup."

"Believe me," said Mercedes, "there's nothing gets these old goats like the baby face stuff and the hair in a braid. Hunter asked me to frame it for a luncheon 'prelim.' "

"Why, what would he want me to go to luncheon for?" I objected. "He doesn't know me at all."

"That's just the idea, you little rube," said

Mercedes, patting her blonde curls as she glanced in the mirror. "He wants to know you."

"Well, I'm not going to luncheon with a man I don't know at all, except that I am working for him," I persisted.

"Say!" interposed Mercedes, lowering her voice a little, "you won't go far in the working game downtown unless you know how to amuse the big ones that give out good jobs. Hunter's married up to the ears and he don't get along with his wife. Of course, they got a swell place and all that, but he stays down at the club a great deal. When he wants to take you to lunch, you're in luck, believe me, Kid."

Just then Mr. Hunter came through from an inner office with some papers in his hand.

"Miss Mercedes," he said, "will you please type these reports and turn them over to Mr. Carson?"

I am afraid my face was suffused with blushes as I realized this was the man who wanted to take me to luncheon when I had never exchanged a word with him. Mr. Hunter paused by my desk and remarked that it was a "glorious day." I realized that he had an attractive voice.

I had no further opportunity to speak to Mercedes until that afternoon, when she told me that the date for the luncheon had been all fixed up and followed the announcement with some sage advice.

"Take my tip," said Mercedes; "Hunter'll treat you white. You've got the makeup to be a real swell kid if you have the right clothes, and if you're friends with men like Hunter they expect to see that you've always got plenty of glad rags. The chances of people getting wise aren't very strong because men like this push have to be careful. They can't afford to get any bum publicity, see?"

"Do you mean that he will buy clothes for me?" I asked.

"Buy clothes?" repeated Mercedes, mocking my accent. "Why, you're singing it right. He will buy clothes and maybe a ring or two and a lot more. And another thing, you're pretty safe with such men, because they aren't the kind that want to go tearing round the boulevards joy riding or any stunts like that. What they want is a quiet time with a girl that knows when she is well off and don't tell all she knows."

"What does this man expect of me in return for such generous treatment?" I demanded.

CHAPTER XX

IN MERCEDES' APARTMENT

MERCEDES laughed.

"God's sake!" she said. "You're a comic little fish. Why, what d'you suppose a man wants for his generous treatment? He wants you to be nice to him and call him 'Mister' in the office and 'Charlie' when you're outside, and to look swell and have a good time."

"Is he getting a divorce from his wife?" I inquired.

"Divorce!" cried Mercedes, "I should say he ain't. Why, don't you know the Hunters? Say, he's got one of the swellest homes in Highbridge. He and his wife are a most devoted couple—got four children and seven or eight servants."

"Well," I remarked reflectively, "I don't see how he could be seen in restaurants and places like that with a single girl and not get into trouble."

"You leave that to him. These old guys are wise, believe me," pursued my friend, the Love Pirate. "Now, I've been going with old Goldfish for pretty nearly four years and there hasn't ever been a whisper. We had one old she crab in the office that got kind of wise. That was over a year ago. She never said a thing, but one day she sniffed when I had on a new gown from Paris, and I told Goldfish about it. She didn't last long enough to whisper farewell."

By degrees Mercedes informed me of the conditions that exist in some downtown offices, of the relations between the girl and the employer that cause so many divorce suits in the course of a year in Chicago.

"Say!" she advised, "one of the first things

you want to do is to get a 'steady' that will take you 'round in public—theaters and places like that, don't you see? You've got to have a fellow like that for a stall. Get one that's on the marry. It's safest to have somebody for steady company all the time. You can never tell what might happen. If there's any blowup all you've got to do is to show that you've been keeping steady company right along, and the other stuff is just malicious gossip, see?"

Then came my personal experience with Hunter. He was exceedingly courteous to me in the office—quite in the employerly way. All it amounted to was a display of consideration for my inexperience of the business and a kindly courtesy that would have excited my gratitude and admiration if it had not been for Mercedes' confidences.

It wasn't a luncheon I attended, but an elaborate dinner. I pretended I had no evening clothes of my own and Mercedes fixed me

in a pale blue gown that I flatter myself suited me very well. It was a little too wide in the shoulders, but otherwise I might have owned the gown.

The meal was served in Mercedes' apartment. A middle-aged woman was introduced to me as Mercedes' "Aunt Pet." This woman looked the part and acted it very well. Mercedes admitted to me that she was no relation at all, but was hired at $50 a month to sustain the reputation of the house.

"Aunt Pet" did not attend the dinner. She superintended all the service, but did not sit at the table. That was laid for four in elaborate fashion with rare flowers and some of the prettiest favors I ever saw. There were cocktails as a preliminary to the dinner of five courses, and wine was served with each course, champagne being the last on the list and the most persistent. I refused to drink the wines at all, and this seemed to hurt my enter-

tainers keenly. Mercedes was especially chagrined.

At last I drank a small glass of champagne, but I saw it poured from a newly opened bottle and steadfastly declined to repeat the dose.

Mercedes drank a good deal of wine; she became very loquacious. She put her arms around Goldfish's neck at the table and he reproved her for it.

"There's a time and place for everything," said Goldfish sagely. He appeared to be really annoyed.

Throughout the meal Mr. Hunter displayed toward me a deferential courtesy that really was fascinating. He is skilled in the polite arts and subtilely ingratiating.

Perhaps my poor showing as a conversationalist at the dinner table caused this gentleman to believe that I wished him to lead up to the subject of our future relation as Mercedes had sketched it. At all events he did so.

Mercedes and Goldfish were tête-à-tête in the front part of the flat. He was somewhat exhilarated by the wine. He talked loudly. Mr. Hunter had taken me into the "den" to show me a lot of portraits Mercedes had had taken in bathing costume at a summer resort. Some of them were very daring.

While we were alone in the room Mr. Hunter made no ungentlemanly advances. Once he partly put his arm round me as he escorted me through the portières, but it was such a venture as any well bred man may make without offense.

I began to believe that Mercedes had lied. Of course it was very irregular—my being there as the guest of a married man—but after all, if he were unhappy with his wife he might seek mere harmless entertainment without being altogether a villain.

Actually I had begun to make excuses for Gray Wolf. I became convinced that Mer-

cedes had misunderstood this man. Once we were looking at the pictures his face was very close to mine. I wondered if he would seize the opportunity to kiss me, but he did not.

I heard Mercedes dancing in the other room and Goldfish was clapping his hands. One of those automatic music things was playing the Tango.

"Mercy's lots of fun, isn't she?" suggested Mr. Hunter.

"Very lively," I agreed.

"Do you like her?" pursued my companion.

"Quite well," I lied.

There was a pause.

"Clare," began Mr. Hunter.

I started. It was the first time he had ventured upon my supposed first name.

"How would you like to live here with Mercedes and be my little friend?" went on the Gray Wolf. "You would be very comfortable, I think."

"I can't live in a place like this on six dollars a week," I said. "It is all I can do to pay my board where I am."

"Well, there'll never be any quarrels between us about what money you need, if you want to come," he pursued.

Hunter was sitting on the edge of a low divan. His elbows were on his knees and his chin in his hands. His eyes were fixed on mine and I shuddered. The man was positively purring like a cat. I never experienced so strange a sensation as that caused by his steady gaze.

With an effort I got up and staggered toward the door. It was a real stagger. I was ill from excitement and fear of discovery.

"Mr. Hunter," I pleaded, "please give me time to think this over. I must go home now —I must. I'm ill."

"Good Lord!" gasped Gray Wolf, "what a brute I am! Mercedes. Come, Mercedes!"

Mercedes came running and I told her I must go home—that I was subject to fits and that I felt one coming on. It was a false move, because the men insisted on having Mercedes go with me in the taxi, but by the time we reached the Congress Hotel I was able to persuade her that I could reach my place better on the street car. I told her I "was afraid to talk."

Mercedes went home in the taxi. I went home in the street car to Mother. Glad, indeed, I was to get there, but after all I would not have missed that experience. It told me many volumes in a chapter.

CHAPTER XXI

CARMEN OF THE TORPEDO CAFÉ

THE Torpedo Café is a gay place. I was told about Carmen of the Torpedo Café. She was described as one of the most beautiful girls ever seen in a café—big, black Spanish eyes, masses of raven hair and a slight sinuous form that lent itself naturally to the queer fandangos and so-called Spanish dances with which Carmen, in her liveliest moods, is wont to regale the guests of the Torpedo.

So I sought out Carmen and made her believe I had Spanish blood in my veins. That was easy enough, since Carmen cannot speak a word of her supposed native tongue and is really at home "back of the stock yards."

Carmen is frankly a thief. She "dopes" the drinks of her victims trapped in the Tor-

pedo and then robs them. Her profits from this nefarious trade average, when business is good, about $25 a night. She is protected in her work by a score of thugs and pluguglies disguised as waiters, whose business it is to "play up" to the women who infest the place.

I had been trying to induce Carmen to take an interest in some other occupation than this when she turned the tables and insisted that the Torpedo was no place for me. She said if I went into the place I surely would encounter trouble. After her warning it was with real trepidation that I entered the café, even though professionally chaperoned.

The roof of the place is decorated with many lights and there are paintings in the nude on most of the available wall space. A crowd of white-coated waiters flit among a score or more tables at which were seated a great many women whose status in life was not to be doubted.

At a piano near our table sat an effeminate young man who tossed off a glass of some liquid and then struck up a wriggly ragtime tune that set the customers jingling their glasses and tapping with their feet, the pianist meantime humping his shoulders and twisting and contorting his body à la Paderewski.

"Say, Kid," whispered Carmen, "think of me working for eight a week in some department store when I can cop twenty or thirty a night at this game."

"Nobody seems to be making anything now except a noise," I suggested.

"They're layin' pipe," smiled Carmen. "Watch 'em get busy after a while."

A pale sleepy-looking young man came and sat down at our table. He nodded to Carmen, but did not appear to be regarded by her with particular interest. Carmen presented him to me as "Izzy the Coke." She explained that girls had to have escorts, and that Izzy

was one of an army of "professional escorts," that worked in the place. She said they were hired by the management to sit with girls until "live ones" showed up.

Men were beginning to come into the place alone. How they found their way was a mystery to me until Carmen told me they had been "steered." As soon as a customer entered he was invited to sit at one or another of the tables, and the preliminaries of the game began. The waiters gave the "buyers" no rest. It was round after round of drinks and the "live ones" paid for everything.

Every few minutes one of the women would go out with a man, and after an hour or so I saw the same woman drifting back—alone. Some of the girls were very young.

Two young men came and sat down at our table. Carmen told me I must "play up."

"Just keep one of them interested while I fix the other one," ordered Delilah. "It's the

fellow with the long hair that's got the roll."

The young fellow I was talking to told me it was his first visit to Chicago. He had heard a good deal about it being a "gay town," but he thought the Torpedo was the best place he had struck. I made up my mind to get that boy out of the den if I could.

"You may take me home," I said to the young man.

"Thanks," he grinned. Then to his friend: "I'll meet you down at the hotel, Hi. I'm going to take this young lady home."

"Ain't so slow yourself," laughed Carmen, meaningly.

That young fellow led me to my own door. I invited him in and my mother talked to him until nearly two o'clock in the morning. I wonder if he will ever go to the Torpedo again. He really was a very decent boy.

At two-fifteen the telephone rang. It was Carmen on the line.

"Say!" she giggled, "I rolled that boob for forty."

Now, if I were straining for dramatic effects, that would be the end of this chapter, but it isn't. The next day my young friend of the Torpedo Café called me up and said that his fellow townsman lay critically ill in a hospital, apparently suffering from some drug.

I at once sought out Carmen. It was in the early afternoon when I found her. When taxed with having drugged the man, she denied it, and insisted that he had left her company for that of two men known to the underworld as capable of any crime. Carmen told me she had taken the money from her victim while he was in an alcoholic sleep, but that soon afterwards he awoke, demanding more drink, and went in search of it without discovering his loss.

"He'd have been frisked before he got a block, anyhow," she insisted. "Why shouldn't

I have the money as well as some jackroller?"

At all events, the man died two days afterward—of "pneumonia," according to the death certificate. Perhaps that is what he died of, but I don't believe it.

CHAPTER XXII

IKE BLOSSOM

I HAD heard a great deal about Ike Blossom, captain of a pirate ship in the "district" known as "Freiheit's." This had always been declared one of the most notorious resorts in Chicago, and only recently has been closed up. The final locking of the doors came after a shooting affray in which one man was killed. However, my visit there was some time before this.

One night with a detective friend of mine I paid a visit to Freiheit's dance hall and café. The detective was of my own sex. She was attired like a lily of the field. I flatter myself that the plum-colored broadcloth with fake ermine facings that I wore on this expedition did much to secure the *entrée*.

The detective believed that at Freiheit's we might get a clew which would lead to the discovery of Mary Holden.

We secured the services of two men friends to escort us. When we entered the hall with its gleaming lights and artistic decorations I was surprised that so attractive a place could have achieved so evil a reputation.

The tables for the serving of refreshment formed a circle 'round the room. There was nothing about this place to suggest evil. Perhaps well meaning people had exaggerated the menace of Freiheit's. As far as I was able to determine the men and women in the place seemed respectable. This was a first impression.

I have attended some of the swaggerest dancing affairs ever held in Chicago, and I must confess that in all my life I have never seen more really beautiful girls and women on

a ballroom floor than were congregated at Freiheit's that night.

It was true, also, that while some of them were extravagantly gowned, the majority were dressed elegantly and in good taste. Many of the men were in evening dress. The spectacle was one worth going to see simply for its beauty.

The woman detective pinched my arm and pointed to a big man in a gray suit and soft hat, who stood at one end of the hall, surveying the spectacle.

"That's Ike," she said, "looking over his flock."

The man seemed to be appraising everything—the size of the crowd, the activity of the waiters, the proportion of women to men—the chances of trade. He had an embracing eye.

We chose a table on the opposite side of the

hall from that at which we had entered, being thus enabled to observe others who arrived and to visualize the constantly augmented throng.

We were barely seated before a waiter stood at our table ready to serve us drinks. The detective told me we must order something or they would be wanting us to move on. She ordered beer for two.

Just then the pianist struck up a catchy syncopated air and a pretty girl, one of the entertainers, danced out from between a row of palms, singing a popular song. She danced one of those pseudo-oriental things that call for all sorts of wriggling and contortion of the body. It was graceful in a certain way, but undeniably sensuous. The words of the song were as suggestive as the dance.

Later, an orchestra in the balcony above struck up a lively twostep and fifty or more couples got up from the tables and began

dancing. There was hardly an unskilled dancer among them. Nearly all the steps executed were intricate and most of them graceful, but it was scarcely a ballroom exhibition.

There was something stagey about the dancing at this period of the evening's entertainment, and later on I found out why. Most of the men and women in these preliminary numbers were paid professionals.

Soon the place filled with real patrons—those who pay to dance and pay for the drinks they get, and really support places like Freiheit's.

There were old men with young girls, and old girls with young men. There were women lacquered like Japanese pottery, their real features completely hidden by paint and powder.

There were girls not over fifteen years old with men old enough to be their grandfathers.

In most instances the girls were said to be habitués of the place.

At least twenty of the young girls on the floor were, physically speaking, perfect specimens of American girlhood. I pointed them out to the woman detective.

"They are the aristocracy of the profession," she said.

These young women are in the heyday of their careers in the levee. They will look fresh and beautiful as they do now for perhaps six or eight months. After the first winter one can begin to pick out the lines round their faces and little perpendicular marks at the corners of their mouths. That is the beginning. About the second or third year they become coarsened to an astounding degree—physically as well as mentally. Loose living and mental degradation show in their faces first. The lines of the face change. The features become exaggerated.

"A young woman," said my friend, "who is inclined to heaviness will become gross and gelatinous within a few years. In five years she is hideous."

The strange part of it all, I discovered, even the oldest of the faded women one encounters in places like Freiheit's still believes that she retains some degree of her original attractiveness—her ability to beguile men.

A survey of Freiheit's soon convinced me why they called Ike Blossom the "King of the Levee." In the parlance of the underworld he had "Queens" galore swarming about his palace of iniquity.

CHAPTER XXIII

MAZELLE

ONE of the most attractive girls in Ike Blossom's dance hall was referred to as Mazelle. If there is a more strikingly beautiful girl in Chicago I cannot imagine where she can be. This brilliant brunette has all the delicate shadings of coloring and expression that go to make real beauty. Her lithe young figure is the epitome of grace and her every gesture is indicative of gentle breeding.

Now how in the world did Mazelle become a denizen of the half-world? I determined to ask her. This was more easily planned than accomplished, because of Mazelle's tremendous popularity. Men watched every move, anxious to engage her attention if opportunity presented.

At last I managed to be presented. My woman detective friend did it. She knew Mazelle and had tried to get her out of the district.

"Breaking into the fold?" inquired the dark-eyed Delilah, after I had been introduced.

"Just looking on," I said.

"It's a dangerous diversion," she retorted. "All of us are onlookers at first. I was too." She lighted a cigarette.

"Tell me about it," I begged.

"What magazine?" she laughed.

"None," I assured her—"I am just an every-day person who is looking for a missing girl."

"Good gracious!" she said. "Don't tell me you're Lucy Page Gaston?" She puffed slowly at the cigarette.

The exclamation was accompanied with a comical gesture of apprehension that made me laugh in spite of myself. Miss Gaston, you

know, is the woman who is warring on cigarettes. Mazelle is an artiste.

"My idea is that a girl as brilliant as you are ought to find field for her talents superior to this," I ventured.

"Dear me," she laughed, "that's rather hard on my philanthropic friend Blossom, isn't it?"

"Is he a philanthropist any of the time?" I queried.

"Ikey?" she shrugged. "Why, poor, dear Ike is the most maligned man in this sinful town. He's positively reeking with the spirit of philanthropy."

Just at that moment gray-clad Blossom passed down the room. Mazelle caught his eye and he bowed. She signaled him, laughing merrily at the joke of it all.

"Ikey, dear," she babbled, "tell me honestly and truly, now—aren't you a philanthropist?"

"Got your kiddin' clothes on again, Maze?" grinned the man in gray. "Why, I'd be as

big a hit in a council of philanthropists as you'd be in a mothers' meeting. It's an even break."

The large Mr. Blossom passed down the hall. His shoulders were shaking with laughter.

An instant later Mazelle was sailing down the polished floor with a man who claimed her for a dance. They told me the man was crazy to marry her, and she wouldn't have him because he made his money in whiskey.

Do you recall what I wrote about the contradictions of character to be found in the underworld? Well, consider Mazelle. She was ruined by her first drink of whiskey. She has never taken a drink of alcoholic liquor since she awoke to realization of her shame. She is a rara avis among the demimonde.

"For my sins," said Mazelle, the last time I saw her, "I shall probably live a long time. At all events there is one man I want to kill,

and some day I expect to meet him. That day I want to be very sober."

And talking about contradictions of character, Mazelle is the bond slave of a heavy-fisted rascal of a waiter named Monohan. If she doesn't gather much money he beats her.

Couples were constantly leaving the place by a certain exit. I asked where they were going.

"They go to the hotels hereabouts," said my friend—"that is part of the play. If these young girls could be kept in the hall until closing time and then sent home it wouldn't be so bad, but the dives called 'hotels' are just traps for them. It is the stronghold of the system."

Young girls were staggering about with flushed faces and bright eyes. They laughed unnaturally and danced with disgraceful abandon.

My guide remarked that if I wanted to get

a real light on the sort of talk carried on among young girls I would better step into the wash-room for a moment. I did.

Never had I imagined that girls under whatever provocation could frame such awful phrases as fell casually from the lips of these children.

As I was wiping my hands on a towel handed me with ceremony by a colored woman attendant a very young girl lurched toward me and poked a little sack of tobacco with a package of cigarette papers into my hand.

"Roll me one," she hiccoughed; "I'm all to the blowsy."

I can't roll a cigarette, but I thought I could. After I had tried twice, intent on evading the exposure of my amateur standing in the place, little fifteen-year-old Tosca snatched the "makin's" away.

"You're a —— of a rounder," she sneered. "Why, I can roll better'n that with my toes."

And I guess she could. At any rate I didn't dispute her.

Five minutes later we were out of the place. I had seen enough.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE CAVE"

I UNDERTOOK to look into certain saloons with hotel attachments. The first place I entered was one of those that make a pretense of insisting that escorts must accompany the girls who enter—and they supply the escorts. I was joined by a man who asked me how business was. My reply was that it was "pretty tough sledding."

"Well," he said, "if you are broke, Tom will stake you. Of course we want you to stick around and get the kale when it's here, but Tom won't see you want for nothing."

Just then a little girl about sixteen entered the rear door. She ought to have been in short skirts as far as her age was concerned, but she proved to be a habitué of the place.

"Come over here and meet Mabel," said my supposed escort to the new girl. Mabel was the name I had given him. I forget what my last name is supposed to have been.

Tora came over and ordered the inevitable drinks.

"Of course," she said, "this ain't no angel food bakery, but there's worse."

"Do they really give you money?" I asked.

"Oh, they'll hand you a few bones if you're down to your stocking feet," she laughed, "but they hold onto you when it comes to settling. I never have a cent I can call my own. They get it all away, one way or another."

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Fifteen past," she giggled. "Say, I'm some mover for my age. Tom says there ain't a wiser girl on the street than what I am."

"Is Tom the proprietor of the place?" I asked.

"Naw; he's working for another guy that's

workin' for somebody else that's leasing from somebody else. I guess the brewery furnishes the money."

Just then a group of young men entered the place, and one of them signaled to my companion. She rose and joined the party at the other table. There was some little conversation, and then Tora, as they called her, came back to urge me to join the party.

I refused on the plea that I was feeling "bad," and couldn't drink. On that plea I got out of the place and entered another of similar stripe farther down the street.

In this place there is a dark rear room. In one corner of it I saw a girl sitting alone. She was leaning over a table, her head in her arms. There were no waiters present, so I walked up to her and touched her hand.

When she looked up I was shocked. It was Alice, the pretty little girl who had come down to show me her gay clothes that Christmas

Eve in the department store just before closing time. She recognized me and burst into tears.

"You down on the row too?" she wept. "Ain't this a h— of a life?"

Her shoulders heaved and she sobbed pitifully.

"How'd you know I was here?" she demanded.

"I didn't know. God guided me," I told her.

"Then I wish He'd got busy sooner," she gasped between sobs; "it's too late to get me out now."

I explained to her that I knew a place where she would be given a home and taken care of until I could find her work, and she seemed to be thinking it over.

"Say, do you want to do me a favor?" she asked, suddenly. And when I assured her I did, she blurted out: "Then for God's sake

get me a good sure-shot dose of poison—that's what I want. And, first of all, get me a big slug of whiskey. I'm dyin' on my feet."

The hardest job I have had in a good many months was to get Alice to go with me. She told me that nearly every rascal of the underworld knew her by sight and would get her thrown out of any position she might enter.

"Well, let them try it," I answered. "I don't believe they will dare."

"Another thing, I owe some of these guys as much as $20 and $25 apiece in money borrowed," she went on. "They'll always slip you money when you're drinking, so you always owe 'em something. I don't remember getting any of the money, but they say I owe it."

Well, Alice is working in the kitchen of a private sanitarium. She has been there several months and is apparently quite content. I visited her just a short while ago, and her

one desire is to keep safely beyond the ken of "Watchful Johnny."

A few nights ago I paid a visit to The Cave. That is the last resort of the unfortunate woman. In the vernacular they refer to the place as "Coffee and Rolls." That is all any woman gets who works there.

Madeline was sitting at one of the tables. We have tried to induce her to reform, but she is beyond saving, I fear. Morphine, cocaine and whiskey have destroyed her will.

A very old man who looked as though he might have seen better days staggered across the floor. The Cave is surrounded with boxes, in which couples may sit. This is against the law, I think.

"There's an old down and outer," said Madeline. "He used to be down at the old California, in Custom House Place, years ago. Too much whiskey. He still hangs on because somebody's always ready to buy him a drink."

The old man raised his head. "I Would Not Live Always," he sang. His voice shook. I turned away. I could not bear the sight.

"It's the old story," Madeline continued, "but the strange part is when you've got health and strength you never figure that what gets all others is going to get you too. You couldn't warn anybody off by telling them to look at Old Whiskers there," she soliloquized.

The old man finished his song. I was too much moved to applaud. A duet was started by two girls. Their hoarse voices jangled discordantly. I bade Madeline good night.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ESCAPE

THERE are hundreds of girls in Chicago, now respectably employed, who have been dragged out of the jaws of living death by women whose work is done quietly and effectively. Many of these women are not known as philanthropists or crusaders. They try to keep out of the limelight so that they may be more effective in their work. It is to the indefatigable patience of these good women that so many girls are snatched from the bondage of Watchful Johnny of the System.

On my way downtown a few days after my experience at The Cave I read with interest a story in the newspaper about a girl who had been arrested in a raid on a bawdy house.

The account told how the girl had endeavored to escape from the clutches of the slavers, and how her alleged husband, "Bull" Tevis, a notorious underworld creature, had beaten her. I lost no time in going to the police station where the newspaper stated the girl was being detained.

I asked the matron at the station to see the girl, and she led me upstairs into a large room enclosed by iron bars. Over in a corner of this large cell, for indeed it was a cell, I saw a girl sobbing heavily. I walked over to her. She turned her face from me.

"You can't hide from me," I said. "I would know you anywhere."

The girl was Mary Holden, pretty Mary Holden, for whom I had been searching.

"Why do you come here?" she asked, not looking up.

"Because," I replied, "I want to take you back to your mother."

The girl arose and rushed into my arms, holding me tight in her embrace. The light had begun to flicker again in her life.

"I want to be good," she cried. "I want to be good."

The matron's eyes filled with tears.

"Come," said the pleasant-faced matron, "there are some big, comfortable chairs over here, where you can visit," and she pointed toward the center of the room.

She then went out through the big iron door.

"You can speak freely," I said to Mary. "That is, if you trust me?"

"Yes," she began, "I do trust you ever so much."

There was a brief silence.

"Do you think you could get me out of here?" she inquired.

"I can try," I returned.

"If you only could," with entreaty. "I'd do anything."

"Would you return to your mother?" I interrupted.

"My mother!" she cried. "Will she take me back?"

"Your mother wants you to come home."

A look of shame swept over her young face as she cried, "I can't go back home. What will they think of me?"

"But your mother loves you enough to move away from Limaville, to take you to a new town where you can begin your life again."

"If we only could," she faltered, her face lighting up with hope. Suddenly tears gushed from her eyes, and in broken phrases she told me her story, told me all that had happened to her since that day she left her home to seek work in Chicago.

Pathetically she related the difficulty she had had in getting a position which would pay her enough to live comfortably. How, after heartbreaking disappointments, she had man-

aged to get work in the department store, the same one in which I had worked the day before Christmas.

There she met Bill—Bill King, the flashily dressed youth "who was related to one of the bosses upstairs." King invited her to go to lunch. Her slim purse had prompted her to accept the invitation. When their friendship ripened, King bought her presents, fine clothes, and treated her "right." Then he introduced her to Tevis—"Bull" Tevis.

Tevis made love to her; he promised her a little home of her own, to take her out of drudgery. She accepted. Then a marriage ceremony was performed. Later she learned it was only a mock marriage ceremony. The same day she found out the kind of man "Bull" Tevis really was.

It was not until the girl had been placed in a questionable hotel that Tevis' real purpose was made known to her. One night a man

broke into her room while Tevis was away. Mary fought him like a young tigress.

While she was still hysterical from the abuse to which she had been subjected, Tevis returned. His rage was magnificent. He began berating little Mary with the vilest abuse conceivable, declaring in a loud voice that she had deceived him.

In vain, Mary said, she protested. She was beaten into silence. Tevis' "honor" had been outraged and he took good care that the fact should be advertised. That was the first essential.

Mary said she labored and prayed in an effort to convince her "husband" that she had fought desperately against the attack of the man who entered her room. She begged him to believe that she had never seen the man before in her life, that she did not know him, that she resisted with all her strength.

"For two days he left me alone," continued

Mary, "but carefully watched me, you may be sure. Then he reappeared. He had a proposition to make. He said he did not feel like living with me after what had happened, but he said he felt I ought to be willing to make amends to him for the wrong I had done. He threatened to write my mother his own version of the story, and again I pleaded.

"And this was his proposition! I was to enter a vile place, and my earnings were to be turned over to him for a certain period, after which, as he suggested, I should be permitted to make money for myself.

"Then I began to sense the scheme. I accused Tevis of having plotted with the man who attacked me for the purpose of compelling me to enter a sinful life. He denied it, but the denial was not convincing.

"Then I was taken to that house where you found me. You know how I got away, but

the following day one of the 'gang' picked me up and I was returned like a lost article to my 'husband.' "

The girl paused to check the tears rolling unheeded down her cheeks. Indeed, she had been through a terrible ordeal. I begged her to continue.

"Then I was taken to that hotel in South State Street where you saw me standing outside the entrance and nearly spoke to me," she said. "I want to explain the reason I evaded you and went into the building.

"Tevis was just a few feet behind you standing in a doorway. He told me he knew you were after me, and that he intended to kill you the first chance he got. His idea was to do the shooting away from the levee, because he said newspaper notoriety would hurt the 'district.'

"I didn't want you to get into any trouble

over me, so I hurried into the hotel with a man I knew, a friend of Tevis. I guess Tevis never saw you at all.

"Then when the knock came at the door I predicted trouble; so did the hotel keeper. The noise frightened him and he told all the roomers to leave through the passageway which led to the alley. The policeman, I was told afterward, frightened the hotel keeper.

"Later Tevis took me to a dive, and when the place was raided we were both taken along with a number of girls and men."

She paused.

"I don't believe I am good enough to go home," she sobbed.

We talked for hours. Finally Mary consented to try again. She wanted to see her mother. I saw a Municipal Judge, and the girl was set free. I took her to my home, and then telegraphed to her mother.

* * * * * *

The following morning her mother came. The maid brought her to the room where Mary and I were sitting. She was a frail little woman, with Mary's large soft eyes, somewhat dimmed, and her face lined and seamed by life's hard-fought battles.

"Mary!" she cried.

"Mother!"

The two were clasped in each other's arms. I withdrew unnoticed from the room. When I returned I found them sitting close, Mary's head resting on her mother's breast. And the mother—peace had come to her at last.

"You're going back home together?" I asked—"back to Limaville?"

"No," smiled Mrs. Holden, "we're going on out west—out to the big open country. We'll both begin our lives anew."

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCLUSION

My object in writing these chapters has been to impress my readers with the magnitude of the work to be done if there is to be any effective reform and to rouse them from a viewpoint too generally accepted that the social evil has existed and always will exist.

Unfortunately I have been deterred through the inevitable difficulties that beset the user of plain language in public print from stating facts as plainly as they should be stated to penetrate the inner consciousness of the complacent American public.

Certain conditions that have been made plain in my narrative of underworld adventure must needs shriek in the ears of all good men and women for immediate reform. It is

not to be believed that the people will be content to submit very much longer to the presence of a band of prowling wolves, tolerated by courts and protected by rascally lawyers, whose acknowledged trade is the destruction of feminine virtue and whose whole activity is directed to the exploitation of little girls adrift.

It is unbelievable that mothers and fathers will continue to tolerate a police system which admits its futility and corruptness when it cannot lodge in jail such widely known scoundrels as "Ike the Kike," and hundreds of lesser satellites who operate year in and year out against every principle of human decency and virtue.

It is a hard thing to say, but there are few mothers in Chicago who really know their daughters and even fewer fathers who know their sons. We all like to theorize and emotionalize over the beautiful sentiment of the

idea that American mothers are their daughters' confidantes—that the American son is the chum of his father. The facts are contrariwise.

How many mothers in Chicago know who the young men are with whom their daughters spend the evenings away from home? How many fathers ever concern themselves at all as to the associations formed by their sons?

If there ever was a time when the girl in the family needed for her protection every resource of motherhood that time is the present. There never was a time in the world's history when vice was so highly specialized. The System, with its octopus-like arms, is in need of thousands of girls annually. It recruits them from all classes of society.

And speaking of fathers—there are not many, I think, among the million in this city who make any effort to direct the pleasures or associations of their sons. In thousands of in-

stances the sons of families that have every resource of wealth and culture are mere hounds of the pave—their principal recreation the pursuit of young girls.

No man's business is so important that he can afford to let his daughter drift into evil associations or his son become a criminal drug fiend, because, forsooth, the ticker keeps up so perpetual a ticking. Better tear out the ticker entirely and farm garden truck on a ten-acre patch outside of town with a happy, well-protected family than reap a ticker fortune that cannot buy back the purity of one lost sister nor restore the moral fiber of a diseased and drunken son.

Many Americans realize too late that in their scramble for wealth they have overlooked the real happiness and contentment of life which has all the time been accessible. A million dollars will not repair the wreckage of a neglected family.

In this hurry-up age we are too prone to neglect the substance for the shadow—to grasp at a mirage while paying too little attention to the ground that is under foot.

For the running down and eradication of commercialized vice must be, as it is now in fact becoming, a governmental duty. The federal government's activities in that direction have already been more effective than all the dubious works of municipalities for fifty years, and the government has only awakened to a sense of its responsibilities within the last few years. There would be more joy in heaven over the capture and lifelong incarceration of "Ike the Kike," than over any other thing that could happen in a backward community.

A chorus of angels would sing with joy over the destruction of such charnel houses as the Café Sinister, The Torpedo Café and The

Cave, and the police protected saloon back rooms with their overhead hells.

We have many excellent women's clubs engaged in many excellent works, but there is one great woman's job to be done which will demand all the resources of all the women's clubs, all the church organizations, all the priests and ministers, all the sociologists and lay preachers of this talkative decade.

That big job is the eradication of the social evil in its commercial aspect at least. As long as the clubs and other organizations act separately and discuss separately and resolve separately there will be no effective reform. What is needed is a tremendous wave of feminine public opinion that shall sweep this country from end to end and force the hands of the government officials to protect American womanhood before any less important matters are taken up. Before we rage over

minor grievances of the sex let us redress this great grievance. We can do it by a nation-wide campaign of woman's organizations combined into one tremendous force.

This is the one country in the world where such a great, unified movement is at present practicable. The campaign for woman's suffrage and its marvelous successes by ordinary peaceful methods in the United States are sufficient indication of the results that could be achieved with all women throughout the country united upon an object that could find no single opponent among the good women of the land.

A legitimate good time is what young people want. Because they can't get it they get into all kinds of trouble and misfortune. Wholesome recreation is the most important feature to provide in reclamation work. It is so important that a city should undertake to supply it.

There are not enough recreation centers to keep children out of alleys. The city should provide parks that will accommodate children. Recreation centers should be supplied by the municipality, not left to commercialized interests.

In the vice districts we find victims of the maladjustment of society. Society is responsible for these victims. When a family of seven is herded into two rooms it is not to be wondered at that the girl living in these conditions becomes depraved.

Is it to be wondered at that the mother who is obliged to cook in a windowless kitchen becomes so nervous and irritable that she continually scolds? Is it any wonder that the children leave home? Is not society, with its inadequate housing laws, mostly to blame?

The system of fining offenders makes it necessary for these women to continue living immoral lives in order to pay fines. The law

defeats its own purpose. Every offender should be sentenced to a state vocational farm and given industrial training after examination as to mental condition has determined the possibilities of reform.

This would keep decreasing the number of women who make their living by evil methods. If the sixty per cent. of such women said by the statistics to be mentally deficient were taken out of the ranks, sent into farm institutions and treated scientifically, there would follow a rapid improvement in the situation that now appalls society.

In suggesting a remedy for the evils to which I have tried to direct attention in the preceding chapters of this story I feel that it is incumbent upon me to admit the difficulties that confront workers for sociological reform, both as to the formation of a plan which shall meet the approval of all religious denominations and as to the methods by which such a

plan may be put into practical and effective operation.

It strikes me that the most important essential to a better state of public morals is constructive rather than reconstructive action—that is to say, we must prevent the turning out of untaught children from the public schools instead of waiting until these children have become versed in evil and then attempting to apply remedial measures.

In brief, we are placing the cart before the horse. Instead of teaching boys and girls the essential truths about those physiological processes of nature which most parents religiously lie about and conceal, we leave them to find out in the bitter school of experience what should have been impressed upon them plainly but tactfully as an integral part of their school training.

I consider the teaching of sex hygiene in every public school in the United States the

first essential to a wide and general improvement in public morals. There is no disguising the fact that the mystery thrown about sex in our present system of child-teaching makes for pruriency and promotes evil.

Education, then, is the basis of the remedy. Given sound instruction in early youth, the child of either sex is forearmed as well as forewarned.

A girl so grounded in the essentials of sex knowledge is far less likely to fall a victim to sex-emotion than a girl whose ideas of sex are fogged in mystery which native curiosity may solve to her own destruction and to the bitter sorrow of her posterity.

The boy who has been taught respect for and comprehension of the sex relation is certain to acquire a broader and manlier view than that which is born of "gang" discussions.

At all events, the best authorities of this period in the world's advancement are agreed

that a marked improvement is observable in the moral tone of both boys and girls who have received such instruction.

I am quite aware that there are many objectors to the theory of general sex instruction on the score that parents are the most competent instructors of their own children in such matters. And this is very true as far as it goes, but the trouble is that it does not go far enough. It is the lamentable fact that there are far more incompetent than competent parents, and the net result is that children in the mass are left to find out for themselves through all sorts of doubtful channels the fundamental facts of life.

While we are upon this phase of the situation I will take occasion to declare that the conditions in many of our public schools, as far as the morals of the boys and girls attending them are concerned, may well be considered appalling.

We find in many instances after girls from thirteen to fifteen years are taken to the Juvenile Court on charges of immorality that they became depraved while little more than babies, through associations in the public schools. If there exists in the mind of the person who has read this book a doubt concerning the accuracy of this statement, I refer such doubters to Judge Mary Bartelme of the Child's Court, who will bear me out in it and supply detail sufficient to convince any skeptic.

The Christian church must bestir itself. The modern spirit among churches is directed toward promotion of good citizenship, purer city government, the elevation of political standards. In pulpits all over Chicago ministers are preaching the gospel of civics. They are urging the election to office of worthy men. They are inspiring a new type of Christian leadership among young men and women who

are regular attendants of the churches, but they are not beginning at the beginning.

The big problem is to reach that great body of boys and girls that scorns the doors of the church because of the stiff-collared religion that is dispensed behind them. To reach these young people the policy of the Christian church will have to be radically changed. I mean that part of its policy which concerns the care and government of its youth. To appeal to these young people the human side of the church must be emphasized. The abstract does not appeal. The need for reality in religion is what is felt by the thousands of boys and girls now adrift in Chicago, subject to no church influence whatever. The church that is beginning to incorporate ideas of social service is that church which brings God to the people.

Our problem is a deep one and no human being can dictate a sovereign remedy for the

ills of society. Everybody knows that we should abolish the grafting policeman, the grafting politician, the disreputable hotel and the low dance hall, but these are all part and parcel of The System.

To abolish The System we shall have to work systematically through the coöperation of the churches and religious and social organizations. And the basis for reform must be educational, beginning with the children in the schools.

If we do the work that plainly awaits us we shall have taken a long step toward saving those thousands of girls who are every year recruited into the army of little lost sisters.

THE END

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